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The Cat-Bird

BY

RUPERT HUGHES

THE CAT-BIRD

A Comedy in Three Acts

1060
1278

BY
RUPERT HUGHES
30 East 38th Street,
NEW YORK CITY

1920.
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CHARACTERS

MARTIN GLOADE.....A Scientist
JAMES BREARLEY.....A Business Man
TOM FORSHAY.....An Ardent Lover
ROY MURISON.....A Clever Lover
ARTHUR NEWLIN.....A Tenor
RONALD.....A Very Young Youth
PARKER.....An Old Servant
MULLINS.....A Hotel Detective
MRS. FAY CROSBY.....A Premature Widow
CORALIE TIPPET.....A Pretty Thing
FANITA ANGEVINE.....A Slightly Tarnished Flower

IN ACT II. A few hotel guests, perhaps; mainly couples.

CHARACTERS REFERRED TO BUT NOT CAST

CLAUDE.....a spider
EMMA.....a female spider
EGBERT.....a rattlesnake
PHOEBE.....a female rattlesnake
ROMEO.....a scorpion
ORLANDO.....a June-bug

SCENES.

ACT I.

THE PROFESSOR'S VIVARIUM. That Afternoon.

ACT II.

THE HOTEL. That Evening.

ACT III.

THE SAME AS ACT I. That Night.

THE CAT-BIRD

ACT I.

SCENE:—*The Professor's Vivarium. The front of the stage is occupied by a pergola porch with columns between which one looks into a garden. The pergola is furnished with a few chairs, and several cases on pedestals. One of these with a wire net across the top is supposed to contain a pair of rattlesnakes, and a mechanical spring making a loud whirr should be ready on cue. Another smaller case similarly fitted with a wire net top is supposed to contain scorpions. The garden contains shrubs with birds nests, a terra-cotta bird bath, and a circular fountain. The back cloth shows a high wall and beyond it tree tops against a summer sky. Between the columns to the Left, a large spider web is swung with a smaller one near it. On these webs a large and a small spider brilliantly marked should be movable.*

RISE:—*At rise the stage is empty, sunlight floods the garden, the fountain plashes, birds sing, bees hum, butterflies flutter. The smaller spider approaches the larger slowly; then darts away pursued by the larger who goes back slowly to her post. Birds hover about a nest in one of the trees. A girl's cry of fright is heard off* L. *It is*

not loud but it indicates terror. A moment later, CORALIE TIPPET, *brightly dressed and very pretty, runs in* L. U. E. *pursued by* TOM FORSHAY, *tall, handsome, and desperate—a gentleman but in an amorous frenzy.*

Coralie dodges behind a shrub, is chased out; pauses by the fountain; is driven round and round it. She stops breathless.

CORALIE. If you touch me, I'll shriek!

TOM. (*Seizing her*) Shriek away. (*He smothers her in his arms and tries to kiss her.*)

CORALIE. (*Struggling*) Don't, don't! (*She wriggles out of his arms and runs to the columns, peers in.*)

TOM. You wouldn't dare go into a strange house.

CORALIE. I'd go anywhere to get away from you.

TOM. And I'll go anywhere to get you.

(*He steps forward, she steps in, sees no one about. They run around the columns to the* R. *He grasps her and tears her gown at the shoulder. She screams. They knock over a case, a loud metallic whirring is heard.*)

(PARKER, *an old servant, runs in* R.)

PARKER. What on earth!

TOM. Get out of here.

PARKER. Get out yourself. You'll disturb Professor Gloade with your antics.

CORALIE. Antics! I want your protection.

TOM. (*Pursuing her around him*) Go on about your business.

(*He throws the old man aside* R. *as* MR. BREARLEY *enters and bumps into him.*)

BREARLEY. Parker! My pet toe!

PARKER. Oh, Mr. Brearley, very sorry, sir, but this gentleman is trying to murder this young lady or something.

BREARLEY. Sir, how dare you commit murder on private premises?

TOM. (*Truculently*) I don't want to hurt an old man, but——

BREARLEY. (*Backing away and calling*) Oh, Gloade! Gloade!

GLOADE. (*Off* R.) Well, what is it? (*He comes on* R. *He carries a large glass bottle containing a pair of tarantulas.*)

BREARLEY. This person is insane or something.

GLOADE. Insane! How interesting! What's your particular malady?

TOM. (*Ignoring him*) Will you come with me——

CORALIE. No! Never!

TOM. Oh, yes, you will. (*Seizes her hand.*)

CORALIE. (*To* GLOADE) Help me! Save me!

GLOADE. Certainly. If you'll hold this—— (*Offering* BREARLEY *the jar.*)

BREARLEY. What is it?

GLOADE. Just tarantulas.

TOM. Come away from here, Coralie.

CORALIE. I won't.

TOM. You will!

GLOADE. Young man, this isn't Belgium, you know. You behave or I'll chloroform you. (*Takes a phial from his pocket*) Who are you anyway?

TOM. That's my business.

GLOADE. Please go and attend to it. (*To* CORALIE) And you. —— Do I know you?

CORALIE. No. I——I took refuge here from this man.

MR. BREARLEY. The poor child! That brute ought to be lynched.

GLOADE. I agree with you, he's knocked over Egbert and Phoebe.

(*Parker comes in with a large knife*)

TOM. Who are Egbert and Phoebe?

GLOADE. A pair of very nice rattlesnakes.

TOM. (*Startled*) Rattlesnakes!

GLOADE. Yes, and one of them might have taken a nip. Good job, too! Disturbing their tête-à-tête! Parker, put down that knife and lend a hand will you? (*He starts to lift the box, there is a fierce whirr from within.*)

TOM. (*Staring in*) Good Lord! (*He falls back against another case, it topples, he saves it.*)

GLOADE. Watch out for Romeo and Juliet.

TOM. Who are they?

GLOADE. Scorpions; and very much in love.

TOM. (*Backing off*) Good Lord, let's get out of here.

CORALIE. I'd rather stay with the most vicious beasts.

GLOADE. (*Gets the box on the stand and speaks to the denizens*) I beg a thousand pardons. (*To* TOM) How did you get in here, anyway?

TOM. I followed Miss——I followed her——

BREARLEY. Outrageous!

GLOADE. (*To* CORALIE) And how did *you* get in here?

CORALIE. It looked pretty. I just stepped in.

GLOADE. Did you just step in with this young—business man—or did he follow after?

CORALIE. Yes.

GLOADE. Yes?

CORALIE. He came with me.

GLOADE. It was after you got in here that he went mad?

CORALIE. Well, he was very annoying before.

BREARLEY. Lynching is too good for him.

GLOADE. (*To* CORALIE) He annoyed you so that you stepped into a strange garden to escape him?

CORALIE. (*A little shaken*) If you want to put it that way, I suppose I did.

GLOADE. How long have you known him?

CORALIE. Oh, a long time.

GLOADE. Ah.

CORALIE. (*Taking refuge in anger*) Why do you question me so? How dare you question me so?

BREARLEY. You astound me, Martin!

TOM. (*Hotly*) Are you trying to imply something to her discredit?

GLOADE. Oh, now you are protecting her! (*To* CORALIE) Do you prefer his—attentions—or mine?

CORALIE. His!

GLOADE. (*Mockingly oracular*) How like humanity to prefer any danger rather than face the truth. If you want to cause a stampede among people just threaten to disclose the truth.

BREARLEY. What on earth is the matter with you?

GLOADE. Pardon me. These are the first two young human specimens that I have caught in my laboratory at this season of the year. How like! How like!

BREARLEY. Like what?

GLOADE. How like they are to these butter-

flies, these roses, these amorous scorpions, all, all alike in their infinite differences.

TOM. (*To* CORALIE) This is a sanitarium. Come on out!

CORALIE. Not with you.

TOM. I'm sorry. I apologize. Come along.

CORALIE. Not in that sunny street with you and my frock torn. I'll not be seen with you.

TOM. Please forgive me.

CORALIE. How can I ever trust you again?

TOM. I swear I'll be good.

CORALIE. (*Relenting*) Come around this evening and make your apologies.

TOM. All right. (*He goes out* L. U. E. CORALIE *stands staring after him.*)

GLOADE. (*To* BREARLEY) She will not be seen on the street with him, but she will be unseen on the porch with him.

BREARLEY. Do you mean to imply that she is a bad girl?

GLOADE. Heavens no; she's a little dear—but she's human and it is June.

BREARLEY. I'm amazed at the way you treated her. She must abhor you.

GLOADE. Perhaps. One never knows.

(CORALIE *turns back with a sigh*)

BREARLEY. Miss Tippet, I know your aunt—if I can ever be of any further help to you——

CORALIE. (*Indifferently*) Thank you so much! (*She passes him and goes to* GLOADE) Why did you talk to me in such a funny way?

GLOADE. I paid you the greatest compliment in my power.

CORALIE. You are Professor Gloade, aren't you? (*He nods with a deprecatory gesture*) Very famous in—oh a lot of 'ologies—whose names even—I don't know.

GLOADE. But you have so many 'ologies that I don't know.

CORALIE. Oh, I'm ever so ignorant. But I—you mustn't misjudge poor Tom.

BREARLEY. (*Aghast*) Poor Tom! He ought to be shot.

CORALIE. Oh no, I suppose I was partly to blame.

GLOADE. (*Suddenly overjoyed*) Do you realize that?

CORALIE. (*Bewildered by his excitement*) What?

GLOADE. I thought so, but I was afraid to be sure.

CORALIE. Sure of what?

GLOADE. When I found you here I couldn't tell whether you were very clever or very naughty.

BREARLEY. Naughty for running away from a brute?

GLOADE. (*To* CORALIE) Ah, but running away is part of the game, isn't it?

CORALIE. Why, Professor!

GLOADE. I don't know yet whether you ought to be profoundly revered or—spanked!

CORALIE. Why either punishment?

GLOADE. You are either carrying forward the torch of life or you are playing with a sacred fire. And when a woman plays with fire, there's no telling whether she will burn herself up or the world.

CORALIE. What do you know about women?

GLOADE. (*With a sigh*) Nothing. I am only in the primer studying flowers, insects, fish, birds and baboons. I haven't got up to women yet.

CORALIE. People in the village say you never

go out. How can you expect to know people if you never go out into society?

GLOADE. Oh, I get lots of society—here—with my children.

CORALIE. Children—ugh!

GLOADE. Do you ever read anything?

CORALIE. Nothing that you would call anything—novels—You don't read love stories, of course.

GLOADE. I read little else.

CORALIE. Really! What are you reading now?

GLOADE. A learned work on the courtships of short-horned grasshoppers.

CORALIE. Horrors! Grasshoppers.

GLOADE. Oh, they are very romantic.

CORALIE. But I mean human interest. Did you ever have a love affair of your own?

GLOADE. Once.

CORALIE. What was her name?

GLOADE. I've forgotten—almost.

CORALIE. Did you marry her—oh, no, you said it was a love affair.

GLOADE. (*To* BREARLEY) The young are so cynical.

PARKER. (*Entering* R. 1. E.) Some persons here to see you, sir. They want to inspect the laboratory.

GLOADE. Did I invite anybody?

PARKER. If you did, sir, it was without consulting me.

GLOADE. Then lock the door.

BREARLEY. There are a few nice people at the hotel. Their curiosity was aroused by the high walls—there's nothing else in town to see—so I took the liberty of——

GLOADE. Well then you take the liberty of entertaining them.

BREARLEY. But they want to see you. One of them is an old friend.

GLOADE. Tell him to——

BREARLEY. (*Hastily*) She—I'll fetch them. (*Exit* R. 1. E.)

CORALIE. She! Oho!

GLOADE. Some ghastly female scientist, no doubt.

CORALIE. But love seems to be a science with you.

GLOADE. Wise child! Won't you stop and—er—fend off these bores? I rather enjoy talking to young people at this time of year. Grown-up people take on a protective coloration. They lie better than the young.

CORALIE. Oh, I couldn't see anybody with my frock torn.

GLOADE. You think they might blame me? (CORALIE *laughs derisively*) Stop it! You're insulting!

CORALIE. I'm so sorry.

GLOADE. You go find Miss Evans. (*Pointing to* L. 1. E.) She's my housekeeper and she does wonderful things with a needle. At least my socks never wear out once she's mended them. In fact I can't wear them at all. But she can fasten your frock so that it will hold shoulders.

CORALIE. You won't give me away?

GLOADE. I can't very well. I don't think I've heard your name. And I shouldn't remember it if I did. That is, if your name is Smith, Brown or Jones, it would escape me entirely, but if you were called *Lasiocarpa Quercus*, I'd never forget it.

CORALIE. Why, you heard Tom call me Coralie.

GLOADE. Did I? Well Coralie sounds enough like an insect for me to remember.

CORALIE. I like that! Goodbye.

(*She hurries out* L. 1. E. *as* MURISON, NEWLIN, MISS CROSBY and MISS ANGEVINE come in R. 1. E. *preceded by* BREARLEY.)

BREARLEY. Professor Gloade, may I present you to Mrs. Crosby and to Miss Angevine? And may I present to you Mr. Murison and Mr. Newlin?

GLOADE. (*Shaking hands with all of them, not noting* MRS. CROSBY'S *quizzical smile*) Charmed, Mrs. Crangeby, Miss Murilin, Mr. Colgate, Mr. Naseby. Very kind of you to come.

FANITA. Awfully sweet of you to let us in.

GLOADE. Thanks—er—thanks. Not much to see.

MURISON. You call this a laboratory, I presume.

GLOADE. Well, it's a sort of laboratory, except that things are alive—so I call it a vivarium.

NEWLIN. Sounds impressive.

GLOADE. Are you interested in science?

NEWLIN. Horribly! I'm a tenor, and if singing isn't a science——

GLOADE. I must try it some time.

FAY. Please don't. I've heard you.

GLOADE. (*Startled*) That voice! (*Staring at her*) You aren't—you must be—Fay!

FAY. Martin!

GLOADE. Well, well.

BREARLEY. (*Edging in*) Mrs. Crosby *said* she remembered you.

GLOADE. (*Edging him out*) And I didn't know you at all till I heard you speak.

FAY. (*To* GLOADE) Do you live all alone here?

GLOADE. Well, I have Parker, a sort of he old-maid and Miss Evans a he-old-bachelor.

FAY. They don't take good care of you, I'm sure—or of the place either. Look at the dust and these spider webs. Where is a broom?

(*She seizes* NEWLIN'S *walking-stick and moves toward the web*)

GLOADE. Stop, you vandal!

FAY. What's wrong?

GLOADE. Do you want to destroy the bower of love—and break the hearts of Emma and Claude?

FAY. Those loathsome objects?

GLOADE. You don't know spiders. They are among our best friends.

FAY. But they bite and poison you.

GLOADE. Nonsense. It's almost impossible to find one that would harm you. Mosquitoes are twice as dangerous. Even tarantulas are cruelly slandered.

FANITA. They give me cold chills.

GLOADE. Ladies shudder at spiders and then dance with the most peculiar gentlemen.

MURISON. (*Cynically*) Are you getting at me?

GLOADE. I don't know you. Am I?

MURISON. Are you?

GLOADE. I hope not. Male spiders are very pusillanimous. See, that's Claude—the little fellow. He's going to call on Emma again. See, he's signalling on her telephone wire now. He's all dressed up. There he goes.

FAY. (*Anxiously*) Is this going to be entirely proper?

GLOADE. For the present I think. If Emma

catches him she'll kill him. After the honeymoon she's sure to kill him unless he's very spry. The bridegroom coldly furnishes forth the wedding breakfast himself.

FAY. Horrible!

GLOADE. Well, there's no reason why he should live. The higher in the scale of life we go the more important the father becomes, the longer he takes care of his children. But the male spiders abandon their wives as soon as they win them. They leave them to do all the work and give the children what little care they get. So why shouldn't the females kill them as soon as they——

FANITA. (*To* MURISON *darkly*) You'd better take warning. (MURISON *laughs.*)

GLOADE. Only a very few of the insects really understand marriage. The birds, however—they say, that the only perfect marriages are among the birds. But that's not true, either. There are some scandalous rakes among the birds—and some very poor mothers. It's the same with the fish—all kinds of lovers and parents. In some families the male fish take care of the young while the mother gads and frivols. Are you interested in fish?

FAY. Not in the least.

GLOADE. Then you're excused, but I'm going to ask Brearley to show the others the spawn of the—this is a very exciting day for me. I'm hatching.

FAY. You're hatching?

GLOADE. In a manner of speaking. The eggs are *being hatched* in different sorts of water of varying degrees of saltiness to test the effect of salt on their prosperity. Tonight will be a very crucial time in the experiment.

FAY. Then you couldn't come over to the hotel to——

GLOADE. Not for love or money.

FAY. I didn't offer you either—just music. Mr. Newlin will sing.

GLOADE. Perhaps I can hear from here. But Brearley is going to show you the specimens.

BREARLEY. (*Reluctant to leave* FAY) Mrs. Crosby would be interested.

FAY. Run along. I'll rest here a moment.

(*Sits down.*)

BREARLEY. Perhaps——

GLOADE. Run along, can't you? (BREARLEY *leads the others out* R. 1. E. *with poor grace*) (*Staring at* MRS. C.) Well, Well!

FAY. (*Amiably*) So you said before, Martin.

GLOADE. I repeat it without fear of contradiction. Well, well!

FAY. And didn't you know me when you saw me?

GLOADE. My eyes are fools, but my ears remembered. They still remember the last word you said to me.

FAY. Do they? Do you? I've forgotten. What was the last word I said to you?

GLOADE. "No." And you married the handsome, the wealthy Mr.—er—Mr.—I've forgotten his name, though I planned to kill him at the time.

FAY. His name was Crosby.

GLOADE. (*Indicating* MURISON and NEWLIN, *who are drifting off*) Is he either of those?

FAY. Heavens, no! I'm a widow.

GLOADE. That's good—bad!—too bad! I'm so sorry—have you been idle—single, long?

FAY. About five years.

GLOADE. Why didn't you let me know?

FAY. (*With a smile*) Don't you read the papers?

GLOADE. By the time I've finished the Bulletin of the Biological Commission, the Journal of Animal Behavior and the like, my reading time is over.

FAY. Did you know there had been a war?

GLOADE. Oh, yes. They had me in harness. It was so like the terrible wars that go on in the animal and plant worlds.

FAY. You don't call those wars?

GLOADE. They're just the same. In a fence corner you'll find the most ferocious battles—with weapons too. Hun weeds choking the flowers to death; on the clam-flats the lobster crabs commit frightful atrocities. There are armies of ants that make slaves. Life is an eternal warfare.

FAY. They say we have made an end of human war with this war.

GLOADE. "They say! What do they say? Let them say!" War is only one of the forms of love, one of the chief activities of society. You can find traces of it in fossils, millions of years old. It's going on in that garden now. It will go on when we are fossils, millions of years old.

FAY. You're not very encouraging.

GLOADE. That doesn't make much difference to eternity. But tell me about you. Have you—er—so you are a widow—any children?

FAY. No, thank heaven.

GLOADE. I beg your pardon.

FAY. Well—I don't care—I didn't love him and I should have hated to love any of his children.

GLOADE. I should have called you a very mothery sort of person.

FAY. Oh, I am. I love other people's children and I have adopted my poor sister's child.

GLOADE. Boy?

FAY. Girl, and a terrible responsibility, a girl is! Especially Coralie.

GLOADE. Yes, Coralie would be.

FAY. (*Startled*) You know her! When did you see her?

GLOADE. (*Recovering himself*) I didn't say I'd seen anybody, did I?

FAY. You said she *would* be a terrible responsibility.

GLOADE. You said a girl was—and "especially Coralie" and I politely agreed. Besides, anyone would know that a girl named Coralie would be.

FAY. How can you tell people's character by their names?

GLOADE. You can tell their parents' character sometimes. The mother of a Coralie would be romantic—and—you see what I'm driving at?

FAY. You seem to be driving away from something, too. But as I was saying—what was I saying?—no matter.

GLOADE. (*Enjoying her immensely*) How pleasantly you simmer. You're as cosy as a kettle.

FAY. (*Distrait*) But tell me about yourself—I wish I knew where Coralie could be—What do you do all day long among your books and—she's so reckless—your learning must be appalling—the men simply flock after her. I'm ashamed to say I don't even know what ology you—ologize.

GLOADE. It's known as "ecology."

FAY. E-what-ogy? Great heavens, that's a new one—not that I know any of them. There might be a hundred new ones and I not any the wiser. Coralie is—I wish I knew someone to advise me about that girl.

GLOADE. Try me.

FAY. You! She's not a fossil. She's alive and just had her coming-out party.

GLOADE. My vivarium here is one everlasting coming-out party. A dêbutante is a perfect subject for ecology. You see we ecologists don't study stuffed specimens or dissected sections under a microscope; we study life as it is lived in its environments.

FAY. Really! Do you go to the drawing-rooms and dances? Coralie is horribly, perilously alive. You know that it doesn't seem quite nice to be too much alive.

GLOADE. It must be glorious, though. The animals and plants are ablaze with life—passion. They fear nothing, they are willing to die for love.

(CORALIE *comes in, tries to steal past the two. Fay turns and sees her. Gloade is dazed*)

FAY. Coralie!

CORALIE. (*With great presence of mind*) Oh there you are, auntie.

FAY. How on earth did you get here?

CORALIE. (*Glibly*) They told me at the hotel you were here, so I hurried right over.

FAY. Have you met Professor Gloade?

CORALIE. Oh, how do you do. I've heard so much about you.

GLOADE. Have you?

CORALIE. So I'm very proud to meet you.

GLOADE. (*Bemuddled*) Are you? Thank you, how do you do?

FAY. (*Suspiciously*) And you haven't met before?

CORALIE. How could we? (*Hastily running to a case*) Oh, these must be lovely—(*Peers in, shudders*)

GLOADE. Yes. That's Romeo and Juliet.

CORALIE. Ugh, look they're holding hands—they're—good heavens they're kissing each other! How hideous. I never want to be kissed again.

GLOADE. Again?

FAY. That reminds me. The last I knew you were with Tom Forshay. What became of him?

CORALIE. Tom? Oh, yes Tom. Why I lost him somewhere.

FAY. I hope he'll stay lost. He's given up what little business he had to follow you round. You'll bankrupt him in mind and money, not that he has much of either to lose.

CORALIE. If he weren't poor, he'd be very nice. (*Looking off* R.) If it's money you want me to cultivate, there's Roy Murison. He's rich.

FAY. For heaven's sake keep away from him. He has the most terrible reputation. A home-wrecker, a heart-breaker. Besides that poor Miss Angevine is desperate about him.

CORALIE. (*Musing*) How interesting to get one's heart broken.

FAY. But not by such a scoundrel as Roy Murison.

CORALIE. Who else would break it?

GLOADE. An expert in any line is interesting, eh? And experience is such a dear teacher.

CORALIE. (*To* GLOADE) You're not such a—such a dub after all.

FAY. Coralie! Really!

CORALIE. I don't mean to be crude, but you never expect a person who knows everything to know anything.

GLOADE. Deep! Deep!

FAY. Show me the laboratory, won't you?

GLOADE. Are you really interested?

FAY. Anything that interests you——

GLOADE. Help! Help!

(BREARLEY *comes in* R. 1. E. *evidently anxious to get* FAY *away from* GLOADE.)

BREARLEY. Oh, Mrs. Crosby, you'd better take a look at these—(*Seeing* CORALIE, *startled*) Oh, there you are—again.

CORALIE. (*Trying to silence him*) Shh! Is Mr. Murison there? (BREARLEY *nods.* CORALIE *exits* R. 1. E.)

FAY. (*Going to* GLOADE *who moves* L. *guiltily*) And you said this was her first visit.

BREARLEY. (*Breaking in*) First visit! Why she took refuge here from Forshay.

FAY. Refuge!

BREARLEY. The unspeakable brute threatened even me.

FAY. Great Heavens! (*To* GLOADE) Why didn't you tell me?

GLOADE. I was told not to tell.

FAY. Forshay told you not to mention that he attacked my niece!

GLOADE. It was not Forshay who told me.

FAY. Who then?

GLOADE. Your niece.

FAY. Coralie! (*Aghast*) I can't understand it.

GLOADE. Neither can I, unless it's a plain case of animal instinct.

BREARLEY. Animal instinct—that's a pretty explanation!

GLOADE. It's not an explanation—it's just a description.

BREARLEY. Where I come from they lynch men who——

GLOADE. Sometimes they ought to lynch the women who——

FAY. Martin! You've gone mad.

GLOADE. Even Coralie realizes that she was partly to blame. Very decent of her, too. She's a good sport, I imagine.

FAY. Risky business being a good sport—for a girl.

GLOADE. Everything's a risk. But the real fault is with Nature, the sunlight. We are hardly more than corks on a tidal wave—only the tidal waves don't reach some of us. There has never been one in this quiet cove—not as yet. But I'm getting anxious.

FAY. Don't be absurd as well as vicious.

BREARLEY. He is vicious. You might not think it to look at him, but he appalls me with his disgusting ideas.

GLOADE. Nothing is disgusting to science except falsehood and ignorance, and cowardice in the presence of truth.

FAY. Do you know what the truth *is* about women?

GLOADE. Heavens, no! I don't know the truth about houseflies. But I'm willing to learn. I like to make experiments and see what happens.

FAY. Are you planning to experiment with Coralie's life?

GLOADE. Not at all. She's doing all the experimenting herself.

FAY. But she's so young, so rash, and the consequence of one little misstep may be a wrecked life, shame, ruin. That doesn't happen in the animal world, does it?

GLOADE. Not so far as I know. Animals seem to be pleasantly devoid of remorse, modesty, scandal, newspapers.

FAY. I wish I were one of them.

GLOADE. Well we must keep Coralie from going wrong. We'll tell her what a scoundrel this fellow Mapleson is.

FAY. Murison.

GLOADE. Murison.

FAY. For heaven's sake, don't attempt to advise her or coerce her. That was what wrecked my life.

GLOADE. You're rather a prosperous-looking wreck.

FAY. My father and mother tried to manage my love affairs. But they couldn't. I was gentle enough till they tried to arrange my life. Then I grew ugly. They warned me against Crosby so of course I was fascinated by him. They saw he was a scoundrel. I decided to redeem him. They forbade him the house. I vowed that nothing should keep me from him.

GLOADE. Nature seems to object to parental selection of mates, eh? It drives the young to desperate declarations of independence. I suppose we'll have to let Coralie make her own choice. The young are wiser than we know sometimes—wiser than they know themselves.

FAY. But Coralie seems bent on her own destruction.

GLOADE. That's what hens think when ducklings climb into the water.

FAY. You saw how I warned her against Murison.

GLOADE. The reaction was perfect. She went right to him. (CORALIE *and* MURISON *appear in the garden* R. 2. E. *and move about in close communion*)

FAY. (*Looking out at back*) Good Lord, he's got her alone in the garden.

BREARLEY. Really the child is too innocent for words.

GLOADE. She seems to prefer to work in gardens.

FAY. Martin!

BREARLEY. There he goes again! He's really unfit for human society.

FAY. How did Murison get rid of his clinging Angevine?

GLOADE. Coralie cut her out. (*Peering out* R.) Yet Miss Angevine is there with the tenor, Mr.—Nolan.

FAY. Newlin. I wish Coralie would be nice to him. He sings beautifully and makes a lot of money.

GLOADE. As much as Matterhorn?

FAY. Murison! Oh he's supposed to be very rich. But he's such a scoundrel—one of those domineering beasts—takes a pride in having a bad name. He's breaking that poor Miss Angevine's heart now—and she hasn't much reputation left.

BREARLEY. Then why do you associate with her?

FAY. I feel sorry for the poor thing. And when I think of Coralie running the same risk, I could slap her.

GLOADE. Have you tried that?

FAY. (*Eagerly*) Do you think it would do any good?

GLOADE. How should I know. It has been tried I believe, but not with the best results. No, my dear Fay, I'm afraid we can't manage other people. Your niece is making her choice among suitors, just as the birds and insects do. She is an orphan. Marriage is her career. Among human beings, money is strength, it takes the place of beauty, vigor, bravery. Mendelson—Murison may be her proper choice.

FAY. But he isn't the marrying kind. He's a home-wrecker, not a home-builder.

GLOADE. Then he ought to be destroyed.

FAY. Did you hear what he just said to her? (GLOADE *shakes his head*) He said—ugh—he said "Little witch, you set my blood on fire."

GLOADE. It's the sun he means. What did Coralie say?

FAY. I lost what she said telling you what he said. But her looks were enough.

GLOADE. Can you translate them?

FAY. She looked so innocent—trustful—credulous. That's my only hope for her.

GLOADE. (*Staring at her*) She does look innocent, doesn't she? Could any woman possibly be as innocent as she looks?

FAY. No. Beware of the baby stare—I could smack Coralie when she puts it on. I'd rather hear a woman talk baby-talk than put on a baby stare. They know better but they can go just as wrong as if they were innocent.

GLOADE. So she's playing her part of the game, as cleverly as he is.

FAY. The game?

(NEWLIN *and* FANITA *appear in the garden.* MURISON *shows his impatience with* FANITA, *and walks away with* CORALIE. FANITA *stares after him.*)

GLOADE. What else is it but a game? For some mysterious reason among certain of us animals nature has decreed that the female shall be pursued, overtaken, overpowered. No more reason for it, I suppose, than for the rules of any other game. The rules of bridge or poker have no reason—no excuse except to make things more difficult and more interesting. If you don't obey them there's no game. So, as I see it, unless a woman plays the part that's written for her, there's no game. If She isn't frightened and won't pretend she is, He loses the glorious privilege of frightening her. If she doesn't run, he can't pursue her; if she doesn't surrender, he can't conquer. You see it among all the other animals. It must be true among the human animals.

FAY. You're odious.

GLOADE. Don't quarrel with me—blame nature. I didn't make the world and I can't explain anything in it. I'm just studying things, and the way they act. And I'm sure that everything human beings do or feel can be found among the animals, and vice versa. Men are just plants or animals that walk, run, and fly, sins, repent them, do them over again, and set up laws to disobey. Plants are just men who don't do any of those things. I've spent too many years on the plants and animals. I'll have to take a peek at the humans.

FAY. It's high time. Come over to the hotel tonight. There's a musicale and a dance.

GLOADE. Oh, I'm not up to all that. I'll come over to tea with you alone sometime.

FAY. Sometime is no time. Mr. Brearley, would you mind fetching Coralie? (BREARLEY *goes into the garden*) Come over this evening—

Mr. Newlin will sing. Awful fool, but sings divinely. I'm quite idiotic about him myself.

GLOADE. Then I'll poison him also, I think.

FAY. Because I enjoy his music?

GLOADE. He thrills you! What better reason, could I have for killing him?

FAY. As if you cared! Years ago you let another man stampede me into marriage, and I really adored you then. You didn't care enough to fight.

GLOADE. I cared tremendously. I had nothing to offer you, then. I haven't now. I suppose you have dozens of suitors.

FAY. Well, I've not been entirely neglected. Not all the men are as indifferent to my fate as you.

GLOADE. (*Darkly*) For instance——

FAY. Oh—one of the most persistent is Mr.—Brearley——

GLOADE. (*Jealously*) That old fool. How can you tolerate the bore?

FAY. Why he said he was one of your best friends.

GLOADE. "Was" is not "Is."

FAY. Do come over to the hotel.

GLOADE. I can't this evening. I've got a most important job. Those fish cultures will mature tonight. If I'm not here they won't wait.

FAY. (*Despondently*) Well, don't let me interfere with your work—not that you ever did—or would—— (*Calling*) Coralie! We'll be going now.

CORALIE. (*From the garden*) Yes, dear.

(*She comes in with the others,* MURISON *close to her.* FANITA *close to him.* NEWLIN *and* BREARLEY *together*)

BREARLEY. (*To Fay*) I'll walk over to the hotel with you. Let me carry your parasol.

GLOADE. (*Seizing it*) Er—um—I'll carry it.

FAY. You must not come beyond the gate. I will not interfere with your work for anything.

GLOADE. D—rat my work—— (*He crowds out with* BREARLEY *and* FAY. NEWLIN *steps back for* FANITA. CORALIE *lingers with* MURISON)

MURISON. Shall I never be able to get a word with you? (MURISON *is dominating and malevolent and* CORALIE *shyly ingenuous*)

CORALIE. I'm always about the hotel.

MURISON. But never alone.

CORALIE. Why, Mr. Murison!

MURISON. Do you know what a fascinating little devil you are?

CORALIE. Why, Mr. Murison!

MURISON. What would you say to a little dash into the country in my motor?

CORALIE. Auntie would never allow it.

MURISON. She'd never catch up with my car. (GLOADE *appears* R. *and listens*)

CORALIE. No, thanks. I don't like to ride too fast.

MURISON. We'll only go fast till we reach the beautiful solitudes — then — very, very slowly.

CORALIE. (*Looking down into the snake-box*) I wonder if serpents really do charm birds. (*A low whirr from the cage*)

GLOADE. I imagine it's the little birds that charm the poor serpents.

CORALIE. Why, Professor!

GLOADE. Don't you "why, professor" me!

Beware of her Mr. Mulingham. She's very dangerous, and you're only a poor weak creature.

MURISON. (*curtly*) I'll be careful.

CORALIE. Oh, has my Aunt gone?

GLOADE. Yes, Miss Innocence, some time ago.

CORALIE. She's such a fidgety old dear. I must hurry. Goodbye. I've had a lovely afternoon. I've learned such a lot.

GLOADE. So have I.

CORALIE. I'm coming over again, if I may.

GLOADE. If you will.

CORALIE. (*Pointing to the garden*) Is that gate always open?

GLOADE. It's supposed to be locked, but you may have my key. (*Takes it off ring*)

CORALIE. Splendid. I'll come over and learn more about these beautiful bugs.

MURISON. (*Much interested*) And are you always here, Professor Gloade?

GLOADE. Always. (MURISON *looks disappointed*)

CORALIE. (*Peering into the scorpion case*) Do you know I'm getting so I can endure the scorpions?

GLOADE. (*Eyeing* MURISON) So I see.

MURISON. (*Putting out his hand*) Goodbye.

GLOADE. (*Taking up the jar of tarantulas to avoid his hand*) Goodbye. (*They go out*)

PARKER. (*Rushing in*) The fish eggs are going to hatch any minute. They're eyeing already. There'll be lively doings tonight.

GLOADE. I shouldn't be surprised. By the way, my evening clothes—where are they?

PARKER. Safe in camphor, sir.

GLOADE. Damn!

PARKER. You haven't worn them since you

read your paper on Plant Competition before the Ecological Convention.

GLOADE. That's true. Well, get them out and air them at once.

PARKER. Are you going to read another paper?

GLOADE. No—yes—perhaps.

PARKER. But the fish eggs, sir!

GLOADE. Damn the fish eggs. I—I mean I'll be home early. Get out as much of the camphor as you can.

PARKER. Yes, sir! But it'll be pretty strong.

(*The little spider makes a cautious approach and darts back, closely pursued by the female*)

PARKER. Emma nearly got Claude that time, sir.

GLOADE. (*Pondering*) Did she? Well perhaps we'd better not take those evening clothes out of camphor.

CURTAIN

ACT II.

SCENE:—*The Hotel; that night. The scene shows an end of the piazza of a summer hotel, the piazza appearing to run round the end-room, of which the door opens on the piazza just above* L. 1. E. *A curtained window opens on the piazza to the* R. *of the door, the end of the building is about the center of the stage. The* R. *half of the stage is occupied by the piazza, which ends at trees and shrubs to mark the* R. *wings.*

Piazza entrances L. 1. E. *and* L. U. E.

The light inside the hotel is on throughout, showing only slightly along the edges of the curtains at the window. The door is solid and not transparent. Near it is a switch by which the piazza lights can be turned on with full illumination. When this light is off, the piazza is bathed in moonlight. A light railing runs clear across the stage just back of the curtain line and should be so supported as to be practicable for people to sit on with their feet dangling over. This railing also runs up R. *and along the back of the stage to where it disappears behind the hotel. It need not be practicable except along the front. A few slender columns uphold the roof of this piazza. On one of them to the* L. *a climbing rosebush is in bloom. The usual porch furniture is scattered about.*

The back cloth shows a moonlit lake with the light rippling on the water.

Before the rise, and for a short time after, NEWLIN *is heard inside the room singing beautifully an appealing love song. The piazza lights are off.*

GLOADE *is on the stage at rise, but at first is unseen, save for the light of his cigar and the soles of his feet which rest on the piazza rail as he lounges in an easy chair near* L. 1. E. *He is in evening dress and should look more perfectly groomed than the subsequent language would indicate.*

Draped along the balcony rail are two dimly descried couples. Near the center is MURISON *with* FANITA, *she staring forward into space, he turning to stare at*

CORALIE. CORALIE *sits on the rail near* R. 1. E. *as a woman sits on a horse sidewise. She is smoking a cigarette. With her is* RONALD, *a bored youth also smoking; he sits on the rail with his feet hanging over toward the footlights, which of course are out.*

Other couples may be seen at the back of the stage silhouetted against the moonlit waters of the lake. GLOADE'S *cigar gleams and the smoke rises. After a few moments of silence save for the tenor's ringing phrases* RONALD *shifts restlessly and speaks:*

RONALD. Coralie, I say, is that hoot-owl of a Newlin going to too-hoo all night? When do we dance?

CORALIE. (*Softly*) Shut up, Ronald! and listen. (*Another pause*)

FANITA. (*Sentimentally*) Oh, Roy, if music be the food of love——

MURISON. Give me a drink.

(CORALIE *moves up to back of stage and stares off at the moon.* RONALD *tags after her. Another pause.* FANITA *turning to* MURISON *languishly sees that his eyes have followed* CORALIE. *The song continues softly through the following scene which should be read in a tense low tone with occasional outbursts of excitement from* FANITA.)

FANITA. Oh Roy, what are you staring at?

MURISON. Am I?

FANITA. That Coralie Tippet, of course.

MURISON. (*Wearily*) Am I?

FANITA. I suppose you'd like me better if I

flirted with every pair of trousers in sight as she does.

MURISON. Probably, Fanita.

FANITA. Roy Murison, I wish I could hate you the way you deserve.

MURISON. I wish you could, Fanita.

FANITA. (*Excitedly*) But I can't. To think that I believed you, and let you—but you made me love you.

MURISON. (*Humming, mockingly*) "I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to do it."

FANITA. You ought to be struck dead for your heartlessness.

MURISON. Now, Fanita, you really can't order a thunderbolts for one on such a pretty night as this. Besides, if I'm heartless why do you keep appealing to what isn't there?

FANITA. (*Frantically*) Because "Once a fool always a fool," I suppose. But you'd better watch out, Roy. Fools can be dangerous. You'll marry me or you'll marry nobody.

(GLOADE *coughs to indicate his presence.*)

MURISON. It is customary to send wedding announcements through the mail, my dear, not to deliver them by megaphone.

FANITA. If I had cared what is customary should I have come down here with you?

MURISON. I think, my dear, it's about time for you to go back.

FANITA. But I can't, *now*. My God, I can't —except with a ring on my finger.

MURISON. You have several bright ones there. One of them I gave you.

FANITA. But there's one ring missing.

MURISON. Why don't you get a new record for your phonograph. If you must play it again, let's walk away from all these ears.

(*He moves* L. *She follows. He stares at the vague figure of* GLOADE *and goes out* L. 1. E. *with* FANITA. *The light of* GLOADE'S *cigar shows that he has followed them off with his eyes. He puffs excitedly. The song ends. There is a sound of faint applause.*)

RONALD. (*Coming forward with Coralie*) Thank the Lord, he's got *that* off his chest! They'll let us have a dance now. Come on.

CORALIE. (*Striking a match*) Let's smoke it out. I feel all dreamy.

RONALD. No you don't.

(*He blows out the match and starts to drag Coralie toward the door. The brief prelude of an encore is begun.*)

CORALIE. (*Hanging back*) The nightingale is going to sing again!

RONALD. (*Grief-stricken*) The nightingale is going to hog the whole evening.

CORALIE. (*Coldly*) Ronald, do you want to make a great hit with me?

RONALD. (*Fervently*) You know I do!

CORALIE. Then make a noise like a fish. Your speaking voice simply cannot compete with Newlin's singing voice. He stirs something within me. Oh, I wonder if after all, I am destined to be won by a tenor.

RONALD. None of your other flirts sings. Is Murison a tenor? I never heard Tom Forshay bark.

CORALIE. No, but they have charms of their own.

RONALD. Haven't I any?

CORALIE. You've never taken me into your confidence. What gifts have you?

RONALD. I adore you, dog-on you! Doesn't that count for anything?

CORALIE. Of course not. The important thing is, do I adore you, darling?

RONALD. Why, I follow you round like a dog.

CORALIE. But I've got a dog.

RONALD. Those other fellows want you for themselves. I'd die for you.

CORALIE. Then go away and die quietly, for just now I don't want to hear anything but that song. I feel like a—a—an aeolian harp. Oh, music, music, wherefore art thou music? Let's go round to the window.

RONALD. To be ready to dance?

CORALIE. No! So that I can watch his beautiful features. He told me that he thought only of me when he sang.

RONALD. He told me he thought only of his diaphragm.

(*She tiptoes up the piazza and back of the hotel* L. U. E. *followed by Ronald.*)

BREARLEY. (*Opens the door for* FAY *who steps out. She wears a beautiful evening gown*) (*Brearley briskly*) The air's better out here, isn't it?

FAY. Shh!

BREARLEY. (*Louder*) What did you say?

FAY. I said Hush!

BREARLEY. (*Volubly, to Fay's exasperation*) Oh, I beg your pardon! Did I drown the music? I'm very sorry, very. I didn't think. I noticed you were quite carried away by the song, but somehow music always seems to suggest conversation to me.

FAY. Evidently.

(*The song ends. There is faint applause.*)

BREARLEY. But I'll be very quiet now.

FAY. It's not necessary now.

BREARLEY. Kind of a nice little old night, eh? Moon—stars—and fragrance—there's a kind of pungent fragrance out here.

FAY. Decidedly.

BREARLEY. What flower is it?

FAY. Camphor.

BREARLEY. (*Sniffing*) That's right—very marked odor of camphor.

GLOADE. (*Growling. Stealthily*) Damn it!

(*Gets up and moves to* L.)

FAY AND BREARLEY. (*To each other*) I beg pardon. I didn't speak. Someone did. Who's that? (BREARLEY *switches on the light, disclosing* GLOADE *tiptoeing away*)

FAY. Martin!

BREARLEY. Gloade!

FAY. I was wondering why you didn't come.

(*Going to him*)

GLOADE. Stand back. Keep your distance.

FAY. Why, what on earth?

GLOADE. That fool Parker kept my evening clothes in mothballs and I'm a pest.

FAY. Why, I don't mind it. Camphor is rather refreshing. I rather like it. (*She takes his hand very cordially*) It grows on me.

GLOADE. Well, in that case, help yourself. Hang the expense. Breathe in deeply.

FAY. (*Noting* BREARLEY *with disfavor*) Oh, Mr. Brearley, I left my knitting-bag in the music-room. Would you mind?

BREARLEY. I'd fly to the ends of the world for you. (*Exit into hotel*)

GLOADE. A good place for him. But why didn't you let me run your errands for you?

FAY. Send an eminent man like you when a Brearley was at hand?

GLOADE. I surrender. Tact is a weapon that only human insects are armed with—and few of us.

FAY. Can't we forget the insects for a while—(*A June-bug bounces against the ceiling and drops near her. She shrieks, gasps, brushes at her shoulders, looks about on the floor*) There it is! Step on it quick. (*She lifts her foot to crush it*)

GLOADE. Stop, assassin! Let me see it first. (*Kneeling and seizing it*) Wonderful! This is the only specimen I've ever seen in this vicinity of the Lachnotherna gracilis. It's very rare.

FAY. (*Shuddering*) It can't be too rare for me.

GLOADE. (*Dropping it into an envelope he takes from his pocket*) See, you've brought me luck already.

FAY. You're not going to keep that ghastly creature on your person?

GLOADE. Ghastly? Cleopatra would have called him a sacred scarab.

FAY. She can have my copy.

GLOADE. Why he's gorgeous! iridescent! He's in full uniform for courtship. Look!

FAY. (*Averting her gaze*) He needn't come courting me!

GLOADE. (*Sighs*) Very well. I see that my profession isn't as fascinating as a tenor's. (*He puts the envelope in his pocket*)

FAY. It's won you a more lasting fame—Will you come in now? The people are eager to meet the noted——

GLOADE. Yes, I'd be very much noted in there. No. I'm a camphorated exile.

FAY. Come along.

GLOADE. Never. It's not so bad out here. The camphor keeps the mosquitoes at a respectful distance. But I don't go in there.

FAY. You're not planning to sit outside here all evening.

GLOADE. No. I'm going home. My fish eggs are crying for their brood-papa. I only waited to tell you I couldn't wait.

FAY. Well, I'll sit out here with you.

GLOADE. That's different. (*He grows very amiable, then groans*) Oh, Lord, there comes Brearley back from the ends of the world. Can't we lose him. (*Fay tucks her scarf back of her*)

BREARLEY. Here is your knitting, my dear Mrs. Crosby. But you can't see to knit out here.

FAY. I don't have to, my needles know their way about. (*She leans against the rail and her fingers fly*)

BREARLEY. (*About to sit down*) I love to watch you.

FAY. Thank you. Oh dear, there's such a draft here and I left my scarf on the—on the——

GLOADE. On the ends of the world, Brearley, if you don't mind.

FAY. *Could* you be so good again?

BREARLEY. Eh? Oh! Certainly. (*He goes into the hotel*)

(FAY *laughs.*)

GLOADE. If you ever ask me to get anything, I'll know why.

(FAY *laughs and knits fleetly.* GLOADE *watching her in wonder.*)

FAY. You are observing, aren't you? Now tell me all about yourself, what you've been doing all these years—why don't you write some books that plain people can read?—what new problems have you been solving recently?

GLOADE. I've just solved one great mystery.

FAY. What's that?

GLOADE. The old puzzle—why do women love to knit.

FAY. Well, why do they?

GLOADE. So that they can have something to think about while they're talking.

FAY. (*Ruffled*) Indeed!

GLOADE. I suppose old Brearley will be stumbling back here any moment with your scarf.

FAY. I don't think so.

GLOADE. Where is it?

FAY. I'm sitting on it.

GLOADE. (*Encouraged*) Why, Fay!—you don't mean—ha, ha, that's how Brearley stands with you? Ha! (*He puts his arm around the roses on the pillar—draws back his hand with an—*) Ouch!

FAY. What on earth?

GLOADE. This infernal rosebud bit me!

FAY. (*Seizing his hand and wrapping her handkerchief round the finger*) Oh dear! I hope it's not a mortal wound.

GLOADE. I'll try to live. All you roses have thorns, haven't you?

FAY. (*Sadly*) Some of us—have only the thorns left.

GLOADE. But you bloom again. That's the way with you, Fay. You were pretty when I loved you before, but now you are beautiful.

FAY. Martin! Is it possible that you can

still say such graceful things? You must have kept in practice.

GLOADE. No. I'm like the nightingale. He sings only to woo his ladybird——

FAY. And when he has won her he stops singing.

GLOADE. No, he goes on singing to cheer her till the nestlings are safe.

FAY. And then he stops.

GLOADE. Well, if anything happens to the brood—or the nest is wrecked or robbed, he begins to sing again till they've built another nest and—er—raised a family.

FAY. (*Tenderly*) A nice bird, the nightingale.

GLOADE. But it's Mrs. Nightingale that furnishes the inspiration.

FAY. And will you sing to me?

GLOADE. Different suitors have different suits. Some sing, some dance, some turn somersaults, some fight.

FAY. And what is your specialty?

GLOADE. (*Growing very much infatuated*) What would most interest you?

FAY. (*Meekly*) Whatever interests you, Martin.

GLOADE. (*With a start*) Lord, but you're a dangerous woman!

FAY. (*Shocked*) Why, what do you mean?

GLOADE. You spread your webs in the most unexpected places. I fly into them wherever I dodge.

FAY. I don't understand what you're talking about.

GLOADE. Neither do I. I'd better be getting back to my shop.

FAY. I can't imagine what I've said to offend you.

GLOADE. Oh, if you'd only offend me, I'd be ever so much obliged. But you don't—you won't —and that's what makes you so dangerous.

FAY. Martin, I think the fumes of that camphor have gone to your head!

GLOADE. Then I'll take myself back to my work. Good night. (*He lifts his hat and moves* L.)

FAY. (*Sweetly, moving* L) Good night. Come over again when you can spare the time.

GLOADE. (*Pausing*) There you go again. Why don't you get mad when I insult you?

FAY. (*Pausing near* L. 1. E.) You haven't insulted me, have you? It's only natural that you should prefer your fascinating career to a stupid babbler like me.

GLOADE. Oh, Lord, I'm a goner! Don't you see that you're utterly ruining my interest in my work? Making it tiresome, lonesome, ridiculous?

FAY. I think it's wonderful, and I want you to get right back to it. I'd never forgive myself if I caused the least interruption in your studies. Please go home.

GLOADE. I will not! You shall not send me away like a—a—Brearley!

FAY. Then stay by all means. I need your help terribly.

GLOADE. (*Sitting down*) That's better.

FAY. You're sure I'm not interfering with your work?

GLOADE. Oh, let's forget my work. (*He switches off the light*)

FAY. Well, it's about Coralie, of course—have you seen her tonight?

GLOADE. No, but I've heard her. I've been spying and eavesdropping on animals so long that I've got the habit of snooping. I suppose I

shall gradually work up from microscopes to keyholes.

FAY. Coralie wasn't with Murison, was she?

GLOADE. No, Murison was learning that while it is great fun catching a fish it's sometimes most unpleasant getting it off the hook. Miss Angevine will probably pull Mr. Murison out of the boat before she's finished with him.

FAY. Poor thing! if she only keeps him away from Coralie.

GLOADE. Coralie is having her troubles, too, trying to unhook a dancing young tarpon called —Donald?

FAY. Ronald?

GLOADE. That's it—that's he.

FAY. She wasn't flirting with him?

GLOADE. No, he was flirting at her, but she was raving over that he-canary, Nolan. Her immediate ambition seems to be to be a tenor's bride.

FAY. (*Relieved*) Tenors don't have brides, they have audiences. So long as Coralie plays with him, there's safety in numbers.

GLOADE. It's about time for old Brearley to come bumble-beeing back. Can't we escape?

FAY. We might look along the piazza for Coralie.

GLOADE. A splendid suggestion. You'll want your scarf now. (*He puts it round her shoulders gallantly and they tiptoe past the door and out* L. 1. E. *in a gay conspiracy as* CORALIE *comes round from* L. U. E. *with* RONALD.)

RONALD. Your tenor can't get to you through that gang of women in the parlor.

CORALIE. The harpies! He was singing to me and they divide it up among themselves.

RONALD. Will you dance with me then?

CORALIE. (*Dolefully*) No, thanks. My dancing days are done. I'm a broken-hearted woman.

RONALD. You're a broken-hearted department store! Will you come with me in my canoe for a drift?

CORALIE. No, I think I'll go in.

RONALD. If you go to that tenor, I'll do something desperate.

CORALIE. (*Petulantly*) Oh, if you only would, Ronnie. I don't mean to hurt you, Ronnie, but I hate to see you so meek in my presence. It's not in the least flattering to me; it's as if I acted on you like a drug. A girl wants to be a stimulant not a sedative.

RONALD. All right, I'll go in and beat up that tenor. Would you love me if I did?

CORALIE. I'd never speak to you again. Marring a great artist!

RONALD. Then what do you want me to do?

CORALIE. Go and be somebody yourself.

RONALD. Get rich or famous, you mean?

CORALIE. Anything. Don't you see, you sweet child, that you can never make a girl love you by trying to make her love herself? She doesn't want her husband to be always looking up to her. She wants to look up to him, once in a while.

RONALD. (*Loftily*) Coralie, I think I'm beginning to understand. You are waking a great ambition in my soul. You're not so cruel as you seem.

CORALIE. I don't mean to be cruel at all, but even if I did, and wanted to drag you down, you'd have to get up somewhere that I could drag you down from. As it is now, you're just a darling boy, mooning around for kisses that don't mean anything. There's no thrill in them.

RONALD. But if I were somebody of importance——

CORALIE. Yes, then it would be ever so exciting to wreck your life or get on the bandwagon and ride with you.

RONALD. I see. All right, I'll get a bandwagon and come back. I wonder what I ought to go in for.

(*As he ponders,* BREARLEY *enters from the hotel, switches on the light, sees* CORALIE.)

BREARLEY. Oh, Miss Tippet, have you seen your Aunt?

CORALIE. Not for some time.

BREARLEY. Have you seen her scarf?

CORALIE. I don't believe so.

BREARLEY. Now, I've lost them both. Have you seen Gloade? (CORALIE *shakes her head and hums the last song of the tenor.* BREARLEY *sniffs*) I wonder where Gloade has gone. (*He sniffs*) This way, I judge. (*exit* L. 1. E.)

RONALD. I can't decide on a career just yet, but the important thing is, will you wait?

CORALIE. How long will you be?

RONALD. (*Magnificently*) Oh, I suppose it will take me a year or two to get rich or famous. Will you wait?

CORALIE. Well, I don't know, dear. I don't trust myself very long and I advise you not to. But you run along and become a great man and then if I'm taken you can find some other girl far more worthy of you.

RONALD. I'll never care for anybody else.

CORALIE. Then maybe you can be my second or third husband. Or I might turn out to be an adventuress and you could help me wreck my home. There's no telling what I'll be. I feel terrible things sometimes struggling in my

heart. But if I shall have sent you forward to a great future, it will be some expiation for my wicked past.

RONALD. But you've got no past.

CORALIE. I mean, of course, my terrible future.

RONALD. Gosh, but you're queer tonight. You'd better come in and dance it off.

CORALIE. I want to be alone, Ronnie. You run along.

RONALD. (*Horrified*) Run along! She still treats me like a child in spite of my career. Well, I will run along. I'll grab the first girl that I find. You needn't wait for me to get rich or famous.

CORALIE. (*Demurely*) All right, I won't.

(*She moves up to back of steps not seeing and not seen by* MURISON and FANITA *who come on* L. 1. E.)

FANITA. You've ruined my life.

MURISON. Shh! It doesn't always pay to advertise.

RONALD. Oh, there you are Miss Angevine! I've been looking for you everywhere.

FANITA. For me?

RONALD. Yes. I want you to dance with me.

FANITA. (*Pleasantly amazed*) Really?—Why—why thank you! (*Bitterly*) If Mr. Murison will excuse me.

MURISON. Certainly. Certainly.

(FANITA *with a sigh of despair seizes* RONALD'S *arm and hurries into the hotel with him.* CORALIE, *humming with profound melancholy, comes down, sees* MURISON. *They pause and stare at each other like two duellists, slowly adjusting their features*

for an encounter. The dance music begins inside.)

MURISON. You! And alone! Will you dance this with me?

CORALIE. I just refused Ronnie.

MURISON. A turn or two out here won't do you any harm.

CORALIE. (*Studying him*) All right.

(MURISON *switches off the light.* CORALIE *protests*) You musn't do that.

MURISON. The light only draws the moths—as you draw me.

CORALIE. Why, Mr. Murison. (*He goes to her and takes her in his arms.*)

MURISON. At last I have you where I want you.

CORALIE. We're not supposed to stand like this except when we're dancing.

MURISON. Why should it be more proper one way than the other.

CORALIE. Oh, it's just custom, I suppose—or the jumping about.

MURISON. So long as there's nobody to see us.

CORALIE. That makes it improperer still.

MURISON. I don't agree with you.

CORALIE. Really, you must let me go.

MURISON. Never.

CORALIE. (*Feigning a struggle*) Be merciful as you are strong.

MURISON. The same to you. Have pity on me.

CORALIE. What do you mean by pity?

MURISON. (*ferociously*) Give me love for love, fire for fire.

CORALIE. You frighten me. Don't make me call for help.

MURISON. You won't do that.

CORALIE. Why do you think so?

MURISON. Because if you had intended to scream you wouldn't have waited so long.

CORALIE. You think I'm as wicked as everybody says you are?

MURISON. Yes!

CORALIE. I like that! (*She frees herself from his arms and moves to the rail*)

MURISON. (*Following closely*) I know you do.

CORALIE. Your knowledge of women is uncanny—based on a very wide experience, I suppose.

MURISON. Yes.

CORALIE. Well, even if I were as wicked as you think, I should have to be still more foolish to permit you to—to be so foolish.

MURISON. Why?

CORALIE. Because somebody is sure to wander in. This isn't a desert island exactly.

MURISON. (*Desperately*) Then come with me where we can be alone.

CORALIE. I'm afraid of you.

MURISON. And I'm afraid of you. You make my poor heart—race!

CORALIE. I? And you so rich and—experienced.

MURISON. I never experienced such—such anguish as you inspire!

CORALIE. You don't mean that you really care for me.

MURISON. I'm insane about you. I can't live unless I win you.

CORALIE. I don't want to be won. I'm too

young to marry yet. I want to see a little of life first.

MURISON. You're as wise as you are beautiful. Don't be in a hurry to marry. See life first—let me teach you to live—and to love. (*Seizing her in his arms.*)

CORALIE. You frighten me.

MURISON. Don't be afraid of love. It is paradise—only cowards are afraid of love.

CORALIE. (*Putting his arms away*) Really —if someone should see us.

MURISON. Come into the garden.

CORALIE. It's full of spooning couples.

MURISON. There's one place we could really be alone.

CORALIE. Where?

MURISON. In your room.

CORALIE. (*Amazed*) Mr. Murison!

MURISON. You'd be safe there. I wouldn't harm you for worlds.

CORALIE. But the scandal! Besides, my Aunt's room is just adjoining.

MURISON. Then come to my room.

CORALIE. (*Astounded*) Really! (*She starts to go*)

MURISON. (*Catching her hand and drawing her back*) Don't leave me to die of despair. I'm going away probably tomorrow. It may be our last chance.

CORALIE. Let me go!

MURISON. I implore you. You drive me mad.

CORALIE. You are mad—to ask me to take such a risk.

MURISON. There's no risk; you could go to your own room and step out on this balcony and walk right round to my window.

CORALIE. Which is your window?

MURISON. (*Moving up the balcony*) Right overhead (FANITA *appears at the door followed by* RONALD. *She pauses keeping* RONALD *back and not seeing* MURISON *or* CORALIE. *Listens intently.*) I'll leave you and go to my room. Then in a few minutes you come up and come round by the balcony. I'll be at my window waiting, will you?

CORALIE. You're sure I can trust you?

MURISON. Utterly. I swear it.

CORALIE. Well—

(FANITA *clenches her hand, smothers a scream, an expression of fierce resolution on her face. She waves* RONALD *back and closes the door.*)

MURISON. God bless you. (*Kissing her hands*)

CORALIE. That's a funny prayer.

MURISON. You won't fail me, will you?

CORALIE. I won't promise.

MURISON. I know you will. I'll be waiting for you.

(TOM FORSHAY *opens the door and steps out.*)

FORSHAY. (*Calling softly*) Coralie, oh Coralie.

MURISON. (*Dragging* CORALIE *back*) Don't answer him. (TOM *switches on the light and moving* R. *sees* CORALIE *and* MURISON.)

FORSHAY. Hello! I've been looking for you everywhere.

CORALIE. Well, and now you've found me?

FORSHAY. I'd like this next dance, please.

CORALIE. I'm not dancing tonight.

FORSHAY. You'd better be.

CORALIE. Not with you, Tom.

FORSHAY. Why not?

CORALIE. You know well enough.

FORSHAY. Ah, I've apologized. Come on. (CORALIE *shakes her head*) Please!

MURISON. Miss Tippet does not wish to dance with you.

FORSHAY. She prefers your society, eh?

MURISON. She does me that honor.

FORSHAY. (*Hotly*) Well, she does herself mighty little honor in preferring you—even to me.

CORALIE. Tom, you'd better go on about your business.

FORSHAY. You're my business, the only business I have; and anyway, I don't like to see you in the company of that—that——

CORALIE. I'll choose my own company if you don't mind.

FORSHAY. But I do mind. You may not choose me, but you can't choose him.

CORALIE. And why not?

FORSHAY. Because I say not.

CORALIE. And how will you prevent it?

FORSHAY. By simply beating him to a pulp. That's how. Even you wouldn't care for him as pulp.

MURISON. (*Bluffing*) Are you trying to start a fight with me?

FORSHAY. Yes!

MURISON. (*A little staggered*) Haven't you any respect for Miss Tippet?

FORSHAY. Too much to let you lay your slimy hands on her.

MURISON. If you have so much respect for her, you'll not try to embroil her in a scandal.

FORSHAY. It would be a nice clean scandal compared to any of your making. I tell you.

You're not going to add Coralie to your fat little souvenir-book, while I have my health.

MURISON. You—you——

FORSHAY. (*Goadingly*) Go on and say something so I can slug you just once. (MURISON *pulls a penknife from his pocket and opens it, while* CORALIE *stands fascinated and* FORSHAY *laughs at* MURISON.) Take an axe and I'll get you just the same. Go on! Say something! I beg you!

(GLOADE *strolls in* R. *with* FAY *and* BREARLEY. *He and* BREARLEY *glare at each other across* FAY.)

(FAY *pauses, gasps, points to the two men, squaring off.*)

FAY. Look!

GLOADE. Aha, the stags are locking horns, while the doe stands enchanted.

FAY. (*Aghast*) They mustn't fight. Stop them!

GLOADE. Oh, let them settle it.

FAY. Mr. Brearley, you stop them.

BREARLEY. (*Retreating*) Er—ah—um——

FORSHAY. (*To* MURISON) So you won't fight me, eh? Then will you promise never to speak to Coralie again?

MURISON. No.

FORSHAY. Then I'll smash you for that.

(*He jumps at* MURISON, *dodges the slash of the knife and seizes him by the wrist and throat, bending him over the rail and twisting his arm till* MURISON *drops the knife.*)

FAY. (*To* GLOADE) I implore you!

GLOADE. (*Sadly*) Since you insist. (*He advances, picks up the knife, puts it against*

FORSHAY'S *ribs and says calmly*) Young man, if you don't let that other young man up, I'll impale you and put you on a card.

FORSHAY. (*Releasing* MURISON *and backing off*) I'm sorry. I lost my head.

GLOADE. Lost it! You've never found it.

FORSHAY. (*To* MURISON, *who is wavering*) Keep away from Coralie, that's all. (*To* CORALIE) Will you forgive me again?

CORALIE. I haven't forgiven you the first time yet.

FORSHAY. (*Dejectedly*) I'm sorry. (*He goes out sadly at back*) I'm always wrong.

MURISON. (*Straightening his tie and trying to smile*) He took advantage of me—when my foot slipped.

GLOADE. Don't let it slip again. This is your knife, I believe.

MURISON. (*Taking it*) Thanks. I can't tell you how deeply I regret this incident. (*He bows to all. As he passes* CORALIE, *he makes a signal, indicating his window above. He enters the hotel.*)

FAY. (*To* CORALIE) You poor dear, what on earth happened?

CORALIE. (*Wrathfully*) It was all Tom's fault, he thinks he owns me.

FAY. He's an outrageous brute.

CORALIE. (*Defending him*) Well, I suppose he can't help being jealous, but he makes me simply furious. (*To* GLOADE) He'd have killed poor Mr. Murison if you hadn't interfered.

GLOADE. I didn't want to.

FAY. Why, Martin Gloade! You're positively bloodthirsty.

GLOADE. When man interferes with the tides of nature, he's apt to regret it.

FAY. You couldn't regret saving the life of Mr. Murison?

GLOADE. Nobody is indispensable, you know —least of all, Murison.

FAY. But Tom then—he would have been tried for murder.

GLOADE. I hadn't thought of that. Human institutions do complicate things, don't they? And the trial would have cost the State thousands of dollars that might be better spent on scientific investigations.

FAY. Really, Martin, you appall me with your flippancy.

GLOADE. Flippancy? Solemnity! There are enormous problems to be worked out in laboratories—cures for diseases of man—animals, and plants—influenza, glanders, boll weevils, bolshevism, everything the world suffers from—problems whose solution would save countless lives, billions of dollars, tons of food. We can hardly get a cent from the state for such work. But let some worthless imbecile shoot another and—ah, how the money pours out then! A hundred thousand dollars—two hundred thousand, if necessary to squander on the vote of a jury as to whether the killer shall go free or not And all the while the toss of a penny would assure just as wise a decision.

FAY. (*Impatiently turning to* CORALIE) Don't listen to him, my child. I'm so sorry for you, you poor darling. Can't I help you somehow. Won't you let me help you?

CORALIE. (*A little hysterically*) You're very kind, but—I wish everybody would quit trying to save me. I'll either save myself or take the consequences.

FAY. But the consequences may be so frightful. Do be careful.

CORALIE. Oh, there's time enough to be careful when you can't be anything else. I'll settle down when I'm old, but now——

FAY. Coralie!—oh, I don't mean to intrude, but——

CORALIE. I'm a little beast and you're all very kind, but—if you'll excuse me. (*She glances up*) I'll go to my room.

FAY. Shall I come, too?

CORALIE. Thanks, I'd better be alone. Good night! (*She goes into the hotel.*)

FAY. (*Watching her sadly*) Oh, dear, oh, dear, this world is too much for me!

GLOADE. That's what I tell you. You can't run it and you can't stop it.

FAY. Do you want me to stand by and let that child go to ruin?

GLOADE. Not if you can devise any way that won't drive her to it.

FAY. But Murison is a scoundrel.

GLOADE. She knows that, and she finds him all the more exciting.

FAY. Oh, you're heartless. Go back to your ecology.

(*She moves up stage and stands glaring off at the lake wringing her hands.*)

GLOADE. That's a good suggestion.

BREARLEY. (*Gloatingly*) They don't appreciate your wisdom.

GLOADE. (*With a sad smile*) Evidently not. Truth is a thing you can neither sell nor give away.

BREARLEY. Mrs. Crosby doesn't seem to approve your sentiments either.

GLOADE. She likes my sentiments, but she loathes my facts.

BREARLEY. Your sentiments are very loving, I suppose.

GLOADE. She is a very attractive woman.

BREARLEY. I was a fool to bring you together again. I didn't know I was stirring up an old affair. That scarf-business didn't deceive me a moment. But I'm surprised at her, criticizing poor little Coralie, then throwing herself right at your head.

GLOADE. But women so rarely hit what they throw at.

BREARLEY. (*With a re-awakening hope*) You see through her wiles then?

GLOADE. Perfectly.

BREARLEY. (*Delighted*) You do. And you won't fall into them?

GLOADE. How do I know?—a young fellow like me—just starting out into society.

BREARLEY. (*Disgusted*) Ugh!

GLOADE. The worst of Mrs. Crosby is that she is such an unconscionable catbird.

BREARLEY. A catbird! You think so?

GLOADE. I know so.

BREARLEY. Ah, you're wiser than I thought. You won't let her fool you.

GLOADE. Not for a moment. I know the catbird and I know her.

BREARLEY. There's something in etymology or do I mean—

FORSHAY. (*Coming from the hotel excitedly*) Where's Coralie? Where's Coralie?

GLOADE. Gone to her room. (FAY *comes down.*)

FORSHAY. I'll go telephone her.

FAY. She wants to be left alone. Haven't you annoyed her enough?

FORSHAY. But she wants to know the latest news.

(FANITA *and* RONALD *come out of the hotel,* FANITA *in great agitation.*)

RONALD. (*Solicitously*) Can't I get you—Oh, Mrs. Crosby, have you any smelling salts or anything? Miss Angevine is faint.

FANITA. Thanks—the air will be enough.

(*She sinks into a chair near* L. R.)

FAY. Ronald, run for some aromatic spirits of ammonia. (*He goes back to the hotel.*)

FANITA. Please—please—I want to be let alone.

FAY. (*Returning to the group*) What was the news you wanted Coralie to know?

FORSHAY. The hotel proprietor—he's pretended to be so rich, you know.

GLOADE. The proprietor?

FORSHAY. No, Murison—Oh, why didn't you let me finish him.

FAY. Isn't he rich?

FORSHAY. No, he just showed me a phoney check.

GLOADE. Murison did?

FORSHAY. No, the proprietor. Murison got so far behind on his hotel bill that finally the proprietor dunned him. He gave a check. Tonight the check has come back marked "No funds. Please don't return!".

FAY. In heaven's name! (FANITA *rises and listens excitedly*)

FORSHAY. And the best is yet to come. He got a telegram tonight.

GLOADE. Mu——

FORSHAY. The proprietor!

GLOADE. In heaven's name, young man, quit juggling the personal pronouns and use a few proper names.

FORSHAY. I can't use Murison's proper name with ladies present.

FAY. Don't mind me. Tell me the worst name.

FORSHAY. He's a married man—with children! His wife has been hunting him—just traced him here by wire. (FANITA *swoons*)

FAY. Great heavens! (*She runs to* FANITA) You poor thing! I'm so sorry.

FANITA. (*Recovering*) Don't be so sorry for me. Save your sympathy for your niece.

FAY. But Coralie will learn of it in time.

FANITA. No, too late. Just as I did.

FAY. Too late for what?

FANITA. She has gone to his room.

FAY. Impossible.

FANITA. (*Laughing hysterically*) I heard her promise to go there.

FORSHAY. It's a lie.

FAY. Of course it is a lie. She went to her own room.

FANITA. (*Tauntingly*) Yes, but she can step out of her window and walk round by the balcony. I heard him tell her he'd be waiting at his window right overhead.

(GLOADE *quietly vanishes up stage at back, unobserved in the wild outburst of* FAY, *who rushes to* FORSHAY.)

FAY. Oh, my God, why didn't I let you kill him?

FORSHAY. I'll go break down the door and kill him now!

FANITA. (*Triumphantly*) Too late again! The house-detective will be there ahead of you. He's on his way now.

FAY. (*Aghast*) The house-detective!

FANITA. Yes, I told the proprietor and he sent for the detective at once.

FORSHAY. (*Seizing her frantically*) I could throttle you! You're as bad as Murison.

FANITA. (*Insanely*) Yes, throttle me for I am bad. But we're all bad. We're all rotten! All of us. I'm not the only one. I'm not the only one.

RONALD. (*Coming on with a glass of aromatic ammonia*) Here, Miss Angevine, drink this!

FANITA. I don't want to be sane. I want to go mad. (*She strikes the glass aside, dashes out*)

RONALD. Somebody ought to protect the poor thing from herself. But I've got to beat up Murison.

FORSHAY. I'll take care of him. I saw him first. (RONALD *runs out* L. 1. E., *calling more and more faintly*) Miss Angevine, Miss Angevine.

FAY. Coralie, poor Coralie, and now she's got to face this awful scandal. She can't even marry her betrayer.

BREARLEY. (*Getting in her way as she paces*) Oh, I'm so sorry. If I could only do anything for you, Mrs. Crosby.

FAY. You can keep out of my way at least, can't you?

(*A motor car is heard off* L. *starting up with a roar and clattering away at a high speed.*

MULLINS. (*Coming out of the house in a rage*) Where is she? Where is she?

BREARLEY. Where's who? Miss Tippet?

MULLINS. Nah! Miss Angevine.

BREARLEY. (*Pointing* L.) She went that way. (MULLINS *starts* L.)

FORSHAY. (*Seizing him*) You're the house-detective, aren't you?

MULLINS. Quit your kiddin'.

FORSHAY. (*Angrily*) I say, you're the house-detective?

MULLINS. Well, why rub it in?

FORSHAY. Didn't you go to Murison's room?

MULLINS. Yes, I went. I been there. (*Starts* L.)

FORSHAY. (*Dragging him back*) What happened?

MULLINS. Don't you know?

FORSHAY. No!

MULLINS. Well, I went to the door of his room, and turned the knob quiet like. The door was locked.

BREARLEY. Yes.

MULLINS. Well, I knocked soft-like.

FORSHAY. Yes.

MULLINS. Nothin'. I knocked again—a little louder-like.

BREARLEY. Yes.

MULLINS. Nothin'! I knocked again still more louderer.

FAY. (*Frantically*) In heaven's name, stop knocking!

MULLINS. Well I did. I slip in the pass-key and open the door and——

FAY. Well (MULLINS *shrugs his shoulders and starts* L.) (*Seizing him*) What did you find?

MULLINS. A nut in a dress-soot studyin' a June-bug under the light.

FAY. Martin Gloade!

MULLINS. I don't know his name. I says, "Who's you? What you doin' here?" He says, "I was pursuing this fascinating specimen along

the balcony and it flew in here—Very rare in these parts—It's a ballalla—balloolup or something" he says.

FAY. But Murison—and——

MULLINS. Nobody there but the bugologist. He said the room was empty when he popped in. I'd have arrested him but he insisted on showin' me the fine points of the baloolup and I beat it. Now I'm lookin' for the practical joker that let me in for this. She went that way, you say?

(*Exit* L. 1. E.)

FAY. (*Rapturously*) Martin saved her. Martin saved her!

BREARLEY. I'd never have thought it of him.

FORSHAY. He's a miracle-worker. (GLOADE *comes on through the door.*)

FAY. (*Rapturously*) Martin, you've rescued poor Coralie from disgrace. Oh, I love you for it. How on earth did you get there in time!

GLOADE. (*Angrily*) I shinned up one of the balcony posts.

FAY. You! How could you?

GLOADE. I've climbed worse places for butterflies and locusts.

FAY. You angel! You wonder! But where is she now?

GLOADE. I don't know and I don't want to know.

FAY. She wasn't there? You didn't find her?

GLOADE. Not a sign of her—in her own room or in Murison's.

FORSHAY. But Murison, where's he?

GLOADE. I haven't an idea. My information and my interest are both exhausted.

FORSHAY. He wasn't there?

GLOADE. No.

FAY. (*Despairing again*) He's gone and Coralie with him!

FORSHAY. You heard that motor-car dash off a minute ago. I'll bet he carried her off in that.

FAY. Oh heaven have mercy on her! Run, run, Martin, and catch them!

GLOADE. You flatter me. Even if I were the fastest car on earth I couldn't run it. I'm a porch-climber, not an aviator.

FAY. I'll get a car and go after them.

GLOADE. (*Skeptically*) Which one of the four roads will you take?

FORSHAY. All of them. I'll pursue him to—to—— (*He dashes out* L. 1. E.)

GLOADE. The ends of the world? Better take Brearley.

FAY. Martin, how can you joke at such a time?

GLOADE. I'm not joking. If anybody is, it's Lord Dunsany's gods.

FAY. But won't you try to find them?

GLOADE. No! If Coralie is with Murison she'll have to find herself. That's what she's trying to do. Let her alone.

FAY. But she's gone with him—he's a swindler and married—and she didn't know it.

GLOADE. Neither did nature.

FAY. He just called to her and she forgot everything else and went.

GLOADE. It wasn't Murison that called her.

BREARLEY. Who was it then?

GLOADE. I don't know. Nobody does. Nobody knows what gravity is—or the power of the moon that makes tidal waves—or what makes cyclones—or Junes—or passions. We don't know. We can only look on and wonder.

FAY. And suffer.

GLOADE. That's all. Good night.

FAY. Good night? You're not leaving me?

GLOADE. Yes. I'm going home and put some witch hazel on my poor shins and get back to my nice insects and plants. They don't make so much fuss about a mere elopement.

FAY. Don't be so heartless.

GLOADE. I'm not heartless. I'm just useless. You'd better go to bed and rest up for tomorrow's newspapers. Good night! (*Exit* L. 1. E.)

FAY. (*Starting after him*) To think that he should abandon me in such an hour.

BREARLEY. He has lost all sense of human decency there among his insects.

FAY. But I thought at least he liked me too well to desert me.

BREARLEY. Liked you? Don't you believe it.

FAY. (*Startled*) You don't mean that he doesn't even like me?

BREARLEY. No! Forgive my brutality, my dear Mrs. Crosby, but he told me he didn't.

FAY. Great heavens, he couldn't have been such a cad.

BREARLEY. The worst I ever saw. He said you were an unconscionable cat-bird.

FAY. (*Aghast*) I can't believe it.

BREARLEY. On my word of honor, he told me those very words on this very porch. He said he saw through you. He knew cat-birds and he knew you.

FAY. Oh, dear, Oh, dear! (*Breaks down, weeping*)

BREARLEY. (*Groping for her hand*) You poor soul. Don't think about him any more.

FAY. But I've thought about him for years and years—for always, and now—even he despises me. Oh, oh, oh! (*Sobs*)

BREARLEY. Lean on me, my dear Mrs. Crosby.

FAY. (*Distraught*) Oh go away!

GLOADE. (*Returning* L.) I came back to apologize for running off. I—I wanted to think. I couldn't think here. I thought I could think by myself, but I couldn't get by myself. I couldn't think of anything but you and the suffering that little cat of a Coralie is causing you.

FAY. Cat! Don't come near me. You spider—you tarantula—I loathe you.

GLOADE. Fay.

FAY. Just tell me one thing. Do catbirds destroy spiders?

GLOADE. What of it?

FAY. Well, you'd better keep away from me, that's all—or I'll—I'll kill you! (*She dashes into the hotel and slams the door*)

BREARLEY. (*Delighted*) Aha!

GLOADE. (*Admiringly, sitting on the rail, his back to the audience, and staring at the door*) Most attractive woman, isn't she? Magnificent energy! Splendid dynamics power. Superb! Superb!

CURTAIN

ACT III.

SCENE:—*The same as Act I. About 10 P. M. The pergola is very dark, but the garden outside is radiant with moonlight. The fountain leaps brilliantly. The spider webs are like silver. The smaller spider is missing.*

DISCOVERED AT RISE:—CORALIE *alone in the garden, standing by the fountain in a pensive attitude.*

After a few moments of reverie, she starts, stares about, looks off L. *Moves forward in terror, then steals to the columns of the pergola near* L. *A low whirr is heard from the rattlesnake box.*

MURISON *appears in the garden* L. U. E. *looks about. Calls softly.*

MURISON. Coralie! Coralie! (*He comes forward to the columns and peers in stealthily, speaks again*) Coralie! I know you are there. I found the garden gate unlocked, and I saw Gloade give you the key. Coralie! don't be afraid. Everybody else is over at the hotel.

(*Getting no answer, he lights a match and holds it up disclosing* CORALIE. *She starts to run across to* L. *He seizes her by the hand. The match goes out. They speak in the dark, silhouetted against the moonlit garden.*)

CORALIE. Let me go!

MURISON. Not till you explain why you didn't come to my room.

CORALIE. I never intended to.

MURISON. But you promised to.

CORALIE. I didn't promise. I said perhaps.

MURISON. Why did you fool me?

CORALIE. I wanted to test you. You tried to make a fool of me, but you didn't.

MURISON. You little wretch. I was leaning out of my window waiting for you. I saw your dark window light up. Then the lights were put out. I waited. You didn't come. I went

along the balcony to your room—looked in. You weren't there.

CORALIE. I went down the servants' stairway.

MURISON. And I went down the fire-escape.

CORALIE. Well, you can go back by the fire-escape.

MURISON. I thought you might come here. Who is to meet you?

CORALIE. Nobody. I want to be by myself. Great heavens, people bother me to death—two kinds, those that are trying to capture me and those that are trying to save me. I'm never alone a minute.

MURISON. But what comfort can you get out of being here?

CORALIE. I thought I could have solitude—and time to think—and to be part of this beautiful night.

MURISON. The night is beautiful—and so are you. And I love you both. Give me a share of your—solitude.

CORALIE. You've lost any right to me or mine.

MURISON. Why?

CORALIE. Well, because I've lost all interest in you.

MURISON. Again—why?

CORALIE. Tom Forshay whipped you. Between the two of you, before long you'll have people talking about me.

MURISON. Forshay may; he's noisy. But I never will. I'm the soul of discretion.

CORALIE. But Tom Forshay whipped you. He could have killed you if Professor Gloade hadn't stuck your knife into his ribs.

MURISON. So you admire brute force, eh?

CORALIE. Naturally.

MURISON. All right. I have a bit of it myself. When my foot slipped Forshay took advantage of me—I'll attend to him later. Now I'll take advantage of you. (*Advances*)

CORALIE. I'm not a bit afraid of you now. I've seen you whipped. You drew a knife. Well, you come near me and I'll let those rattlesnakes loose on you. (*She shakes the cage. There is a loud whirr.* MURISON *falls back*)

MURISON. Well, our chances are equal. I'll take the risk. (*He moves forward*)

CORALIE. You dare!

(*The lights are suddenly turned on in the corridor* R. *faintly illuminating the pergola.* CORALIE *and* MURISON *are equally startled.* CORALIE *drops behind the snake-box.* MURISON *steals out* L. 1. E.)

(GLOADE *comes in slowly* R. 1. E. *in evening dress, with hat and coat. He is smoking. There is a low whirr from the snake-box.*)

PARKER. (*Following*) I'll find the light-switch in a moment, sir.

GLOADE. Not just yet. (*He gives* PARKER *the hat and coat*)

PARKER. A slight trace of camphor still, sir.

GLOADE. Yes, the hotel guests got most of it.

PARKER. The fish-eggs hatched, sir, and you didn't get back. And I didn't know what to do.

GLOADE. (*Indifferently*) Too bad.

PARKER. A whole year's work wasted. No chance till another June, sir, is there?

GLOADE. But there are always other Junes, Parker.

PARKER. Yes, sir, I presume so, sir. But there may be other people here then.

GLOADE. A very just qualification.

GLOADE. (*Leaning against a pillar and staring out into the garden—as he smokes, the smoke floating*) A strange thing, night, Parker.

PARKER. I'd hardly say that, sir; we have one every night.

GLOADE. Another correct observation. But I mean the things that go on in the dark are strange—baffling. Down inside the seed, inside the larva, inside the egg, in the depths of the sea; in the tunnels of the moles, in the caves, in the butterfly's heart, in the mind of the apple-blossom, in the soul of the weeds.

PARKER. Do you give weeds a soul, sir?

GLOADE. I don't, but somebody does. They fight for life, organize trusts, choke off competition, send out colonies. Poor science, it's always hunting round in the dark with a little search-light. The human heart, itself, is only a seed or an egg at first.

PARKER. There's a few of the fish-eggs not out yet, sir, if you'd care to look at them.

GLOADE. I'm too tired to look at them.

PARKER. A hard evening in society, sir?

GLOADE. It is very wearing for a total stranger. It's too much for me—I don't know enough. When I take off these clothes tonight, Parker, don't put 'em in camphor again.

PARKER. What shall I do with them, sir?

GLOADE. Burn 'em!

PARKER. But there'll be other conventions of learned societies, so to speak, sir.

GLOADE. "Learned societies, so to speak"—ha! where are there any? And who wants learning? I tried to use a little of mine tonight on people and it was as welcome as—as camphor in evening clothes. I don't belong in the human vivarium—especially not among women.

PARKER. Well, sir, as to women: I've often told you about my own poor wife.

GLOADE. Yes, you have—often. Any other news?

PARKER. Well, sir, there's Emma and Claude. At least, there *was* Claude.

GLOADE. (*Moving to the web* L.) You don't mean that Claude—

PARKER. Yes, sir, Claude went a little too far and she—destroyed him, so to speak, sir.

GLOADE. A good job, too. Yes, there she sits, the original suffragette, smiling, I suppose, and licking her chops. She's purring, too, no doubt, if we could hear her.

PARKER. Women are risky pests, sir.

GLOADE. They are just that. Claude should have stayed in his own vivarium—and never have taken his evening clothes out of camphor.

PARKER. I'll hang up your things, sir.

(*Moves out* L. 1. E., *is heard giving a little gasp, then a sharp call*) Who's that?

GLOADE. Who's what?

PARKER. (*Appearing* L.) Somebody or something moved in that room, sir.

GLOADE. I hope none of the snakes are out.

PARKER. Oh, Gawd, sir, don't you suggest it! But this was more like a man—slipped by me like.

GLOADE. Put on the light in there—or shall I?

PARKER. Yes, sir. I will, sir, as soon as I find the switch. (*Exit* L.)

GLOADE. (*Going* R. *and groping for the switch, turns on the lights, disclosing* CORALIE *cowering behind the snake-box. He stares at*

her. She rises.) The man in there is Murison, I suppose.

CORALIE. (*Terrified by the situation she is in*) Yes—but you mustn't think——

GLOADE. But I must think! Stay where you were. Hide. (*Calling*) Oh, Parker. Never mind the light. Come here. (PARKER *appearing and still carrying the hat and coat.* CORALIE *drops back—behind the snake-box*)

PARKER. Yes, sir.

GLOADE. Oh—er——

PARKER. I don't much fancy following a burglar or a snake through the dark. I'll telephone the police if you don't mind.

GLOADE. I do mind. You go hang up those things and wait by the front door till I call you. I'll watch the garden.

PARKER. (*Crossing* R. *in terror*) Yes, sir—if you n-need me—just c-call.

GLOADE. I will. (*He watches* PARKER'S *exit* R. 1. E., *then turns to* CORALIE) You may come out now. (CORALIE *stands up. He speaks sternly*) You're a worse fool than I thought, but it's unkind of you to use my garden for your—your affairs.

CORALIE. Oh, you don't imagine for a moment——

GLOADE. I have to imagine all the time—in my business. Besides, my eyes tell me you are here, and you told me Murison was here.

CORALIE. But——

GLOADE. A fine mess the two of you have made of our respectable village.

CORALIE. But——

GLOADE. Did you know, by the way, that Murison is a fraud financially—and every other way?

CORALIE. That makes no difference to me.

GLOADE. Are you as brazen as that? Well, then, does it make any difference to you that Murison is a married man with an abandoned wife and an assortment of children?

CORALIE. Not the least.

GLOADE. You're more abandoned than the wife, eh? Well, considering Murison's handicaps, I must say he does pretty well as a lover. You're not even shocked by his record.

CORALIE. Nothing you can say about Mr. Murison will shock me. I know him better than you do.

GLOADE. And you still love him!

CORALIE. As much as I love one of your scorpions. I'd as soon have him kiss me.

GLOADE. Really! Then why are you here with him?

CORALIE. He followed me.

GLOADE. After you left his room?

CORALIE. I never left his room, because I never went there.

GLOADE. You didn't?

CORALIE. Of course not. You disgust me!

GLOADE. It's the camphor. So you never went to his room at all, and all that post-climbing for nothing! That explains why I didn't find you there.

CORALIE. You didn't find me there? Did you look for me—*there?!*

GLOADE. Did I? My shins can answer for that.

CORALIE. (*Haughtily*) But why did you look for *me* in such a place?

GLOADE. For the same reason that the house-detective did.

CORALIE. (*Almost swooning as* GLOADE *slips a chair under her*) The house-detective? What under heaven—what made him go there?

GLOADE. You were overheard saying you would.

CORALIE. I never said I would. I said I might.

GLOADE. In God's name, why should such a nice clean girl say she might do such a thing?

CORALIE. He begged me to. I wanted to get rid of him.

GLOADE. It won't be so easy to get rid of the story.

CORALIE. Has anybody else heard it?

GLOADE. Fanita was doing her best to tell everybody in the United States.

CORALIE. (*Collapsing*) Oh, I'm lost now. I might as well die. I must die.

GLOADE. You must not.

CORALIE. Why not?

GLOADE. In the first place, Fanita has copyrighted the line. In the second place, she won't kill herself, and you must not.

CORALIE. Must not?

GLOADE. You have no right to.

CORALIE. Who has any right to say what I shall do with my life?

GLOADE. The future generations. When a young woman takes her own life, she murders children unborn, and their children. She kills fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, heroes, presidents, soldiers, doctors—you have no more right to kill yourself than the Germans had to attack Belgium, and in the long run, you'd be killing as many people.

CORALIE. That's a horrible thought!

GLOADE. If you were a man, it wouldn't matter so much. The death of a spider—or a Murison—doesn't count. Murison has begotten children. They may redeem his career. It would probably be a blessing to annihilate him. (*Call-*

ing off) I hope you are hearing this, Murison. (*He waits*) He can't think up a good answer. But we'll not worry about him.

CORALIE. What's to become of me, then?

GLOADE. Why, you're as unharmed as if you were just born. You've been through the fire and taken excellent care of yourself. You have more brains than I thought you had—and I thought you had.

CORALIE. But my poor Aunt—I treated her so harshly. She'll never love me again.

GLOADE. She may never love me again, but she worships you. You should have seen her light into me for daring to criticize you.

CORALIE. (*Smiling a little*) Did she?

GLOADE. She did! That's right, smile. For God's sake, smile.

CORALIE. (*Very gloomy again*) No, I shall never smile again.

GLOADE. Oh, yes you will. One of those drooping columbines out there might as well threaten not to lift its head when the sun comes up again.

CORALIE. There'll be no more sunrises for me. Did Tom Forshay hear the awful story?

GLOADE. Yes, and you could have heard him for a mile—especially when he heard that Murison had a wife and children.

CORALIE. That's the only encouraging thing I've heard about the beast.

GLOADE. That he's married? (CORALIE *nods*) Why is that encouraging?

CORALIE. Because that will prevent anybody from trying to force me to marry him to make me an honest woman.

GLOADE. If you come to that, suppose somebody finds us two alone here, who's going to marry me and make an honest man of me.

CORALIE. Oh, Auntie is simply crazy about you.

GLOADE. She acted as if she were, said she'd kill me if I spoke to her.

CORALIE. Oh, if you'll get me out of this, I'll make her marry you.

GLOADE. I thought you didn't believe in forced marriages?

CORALIE. Not with Murisons—but with nice men like you.

GLOADE. Oh, I'm a nice man now.

CORALIE. Well, I have hopes of you. I'll see.

GLOADE. But we're forgetting Murison. He's hearing too much.

CORALIE. If he comes near me, I'll——

GLOADE. Let him take warning by Claude's fate. (*He goes* L. *and calls off*) Murison. Murison! You might as well come out. I know you are there. (*Getting no answer, he goes out* L. 1. E.*; the light is turned on there.* GLOADE *comes back*) Like so many other things I know, this wasn't true. You're sure he was here?

CORALIE. Too horribly sure. He came in because I opened the garden gate and left it unlocked.

GLOADE. Then he must have gone out the same way. We shan't miss him, shall we?

CORALIE. (*Darkly*) If I could shoot straight, I wouldn't miss him. He's destroyed my good name.

GLOADE. But a good name can always be made to bloom again.

CORALIE. If Tom Forshay had only been let alone.

GLOADE. The most unpopular thing I ever did was to save the life of that tomato-worm Murison.

CORALIE. Tom is so wonderfully strong.

GLOADE. You have had evidence of that. In fact, our acquaintance began right here with rescuing you from Tom. I wonder if I ought to have interfered.

CORALIE. Oh, I'm glad you did. You saved us from a tragedy—from one tragedy for another. I was a beast to poor Tom.

GLOADE. "Poor Tom's a-cold." You could never say that. You don't loathe him?

CORALIE. Loathe Tom! He's the noblest man I ever saw.

GLOADE. (*Studying her*) Without exception?

CORALIE. Without exception — excepting you, of course.

GLOADE. Me! Oh, I wasn't fishing. I was trying to think. Now about this Forshay feller —if he could be induced to——

CORALIE. Forgive me?

GLOADE. Well, you don't exactly need forgiveness. If he could be brought to see the truth, he might be quite willing to marry you and—make you an honest——

CORALIE. Oh, I wouldn't marry Tom for worlds!

GLOADE. You couldn't love him?

CORALIE. I couldn't help it. I've tried not to—but I couldn't.

GLOADE. Then why not marry him if he asks you to?

CORALIE. He's too noble and glorious and I love him too well to let him sacrifice himself for a—a besmirched creature like me.

GLOADE. Nonsense.

CORALIE. I mean it. You'll see!

(TOM FORSHAY *appears in the garden* L. U. E. *very vaguely.*)

CORALIE. (*Turning and seeing him*) Who's that?

GLOADE. It must be Murison trying to find his way out. Let him go. In fact, I'll show him the way and good riddance of bad rubbish. (*Stepping out into the garden*) Is that you, Murison?

FORSHAY. No, this is Tom Forshay.

(CORALIE *with a gasp flees across and out* L. 1. E., *closing the door after her.*)

GLOADE. Oh, how did you get here?

FORSHAY. May I come in?

GLOADE. (*Looking in and seeing that* CORALIE *has fled*) Well—er—yes. Come in.

(FORSHAY *comes in and shows signs of exhaustion and anxiety.* CORALIE *opens the door and keeps it slightly ajar.*)

FORSHAY. Coralie here? No, she couldn't be.

GLOADE. You ask yourself a question and answer it. Quite complete. Saves me a lot of trouble.

FORSHAY. I'm looking everywhere for her.

GLOADE. I thought you had followed the motor-car that dashed off with Murison.

FORSHAY. Before I started after it, I decided to make sure if Murison was in it.

GLOADE. My boy, what a happy thought!

FORSHAY. I asked the starter and he said it was an old lady trying to catch the down train, so I didn't go after it.

GLOADE. Young man, you're a genius. So few people ever stop to find out if the chimera they are chasing is the one they are after. You're procedure was scientific.

FORSHAY. Thank you, sir. But having elim-

inated the only clue I had because it was false—I had no other. So I've been just stumbling along, trying one theory after another and discarding it.

GLOADE. That's the scientific procedure exactly. If you want a job in my vivarium, you can have it.

FORSHAY. Thank you, Murison is the job I'm looking for.

GLOADE. Well, why did you try this place?

FORSHAY. Well, I'd tried nearly every other, and the gate was unlocked. I had been here, of course, this morning.

GLOADE. Yes, I believe I remember.

FORSHAY. I'll never forget it. I came near being worse than Murison. God help me.

GLOADE. With the vital difference that you were unmarried.

FORSHAY. And I'll always remain so.

GLOADE. You mean you prefer to go about trying to overpower pretty young women in other people's gardens?

FORSHAY. Sir!

GLOADE. Frankly, is it your custom to attack all the beautiful ladies you meet?

FORSHAY. I never attacked anybody—but Coralie. I never really cared for anybody but her. I've flirted—of course, but the rest of 'em leave me cold. They may be pretty, but she's the only one whose beauty drives me mad.

GLOADE. That seems to be the only excuse for beauty—that it wakens dormant beings to—enthusiasm.

FORSHAY. That's the trouble. Coralie's beauty wakens enthusiasm in other people, too.

GLOADE. That's another trouble. In the dark, all cats are gray and in the light beauty is visible to everybody.

FORSHAY. Coralie naturally doesn't want to live on a desert island with me. I ought to love to have everybody else admire her and make love to her, but I can't. I go wild at the sight of another man making up to her.

GLOADE. That's a good sign, and a healthy one.

FORSHAY. Coralie drives me mad and is proud of it.

GLOADE. That's all right so long as she doesn't drive you to the electric-chair.

FORSHAY. I wouldn't mind that if I got Murison first. I suppose it's plain blind jealousy, but I want to fight every man that comes round her. And I want to carry Coralie away to a cave or a tree-top and have her all to myself. I'm just a plain common damn fool you see, sir.

GLOADE. Very common—in fact, almost universal.

FORSHAY. That's why I lost my head in here. Coralie loves to tease and flirt and she got me so excited that I went crazy, I suppose. Fortunately, you saved her from me and me from myself. But then she had to go and go crazy over that blackguard of a Murison, and now who's to save her from him? Isn't this the damnedest world you ever saw.

GLOADE. Yes: also the delightfullest; in fact, the only one I remember.

FORSHAY. I'd better start out again on the hunt.

GLOADE. And you're sure that Coralie is the only one that—er—maddens you?

FORSHAY. She's the one woman on earth for me—and I'm going to hunt the earth over to find her. Murison may have her but he can't keep her from me. She's mine and I'm hers and

—oh, hell, what's the use of talking. I'll be on my way.

GLOADE. Just a minute. I think I heard the doorbell. It might be news from Coralie.

PARKER. (*Appearing* R.) People for you, sir. I didn't know you had a caller. I told them you were probably in bed, sir—but—you're not, are you?

GLOADE. That depends on the people. Who are they?

PARKER. Mr. Brearley, sir.

GLOADE. I'm in bed!

PARKER. And Mrs. Crosby.

GLOADE. I'm up and dressed.

PARKER. Will you come into the drawing-room, sir?

GLOADE. All right. (*Glances at the door* L. 1. E.) No, ask them out here. (PARKER *goes* R. 1. E.) The camphor is less asphyxiating in the open air.

FORSHAY. I wonder if they have any information.

GLOADE. They wouldn't bring it here if they had. (FAY *and* BREARLEY *come in* R. 1. E. *and stand embarrassed.*) (*To* FAY *with mock timidity*) Have you come to kill me in my own web?

FAY. (*Piteously*) Don't make fun of me, Martin.

BREARLEY. Have some respect for grief, can't you?

GLOADE. Certainly, old Ends-of-the-World-for-Thee.

BREARLEY. He is incorrigible.

FAY. I've come for your help again, Martin. I've exhausted my own resources. I throw myself on your mercy.

BREARLEY. You throw yourself on a rock.

GLOADE. Try this chair. (*Pushes one to* FAY *cautiously.*)

FAY. Don't mock me. I'm simply distracted about poor Coralie. Where is the darling now? How can we save her?

GLOADE. Don't try to interf——

FAY. Martin, if you mention Nature to me again, I'll scream!

GLOADE. It's the best thing you could do in your present tension. If you'll promise to let out a good scream, I'll tell you where she is.

FAY. You know?

GLOADE. Yes. She's in there—perfectly safe—alone—no Murison.

FAY. (*In a whisper of stupefaction*) In there? Safe? Ah!

GLOADE. Is that all the noise I get?

FORSHAY. (*With a roar*) Coralie! In there?

GLOADE. That's more like it. Let's hear from you, Brearley. (*Brearley grunts with disgust.* GLOADE *shakes his head*) Very poor.

FAY. I don't believe it.

FORSHAY. I'll go for her.

(CORALIE, *who has held the door slightly ajar, closes it and the lock snaps.*)

GLOADE. (*Checking him*) Then she won't be there. You heard the spring-lock snap.

FAY. (*Pleadingly*) Bring her to me.

GLOADE. She won't come.

FAY. Why?

GLOADE. Because Mr. Forshay is here.

FORSHAY. Then I'll go away. (*Moves* R.)

GLOADE. (*Checking him*) Oh, no, that would spoil everything.

FAY. Martin Gloade, you're trying to drive me insane. Coralie isn't there at all.

GLOADE. (*Not very loudly*) No? Oh, Miss Tippet—can you hear me?

CORALIE. (*Off* L.) No.

FAY. (*Running to the door*) It's her voice. Coralie—my darling, won't you come to see me? (*She listens*)

FORSHAY. What does she say?

FAY. She's murmuring that she has disgraced me and she'll never look me in the face again.

FORSHAY. If I only had Murison's windpipe in my hands.

GLOADE. You ought to be much obliged to him.

FORSHAY. Obliged to Murison?

GLOADE. Come over here. (*Goes* R.) If you had heard what Coralie told me, you would know that you are the only man she ever could love, and what awakened her to the fact was the way you trounced Murison. Ergo, he is your best friend. Q. E. D.

FORSHAY. But if she loves me, why won't she let me tell her how I love her?

GLOADE. Because she's of the type that has to be carried by storm. Thousands of years of ancestry——

FAY. There you go again, Martin.

GLOADE. Well, anyway, the one way you can win her is by carrying her off in spite of herself. The poor little frightened soul is so remorseful because she did what her foremothers have done—I've got to say it, Fay—for thousands—well, you know—that she thinks she's unworthy of you.

FORSHAY. That angel unworthy of me?

GLOADE. Well, as long as you can both keep on thinking yourselves unworthy of each other,

the marriage will be perfect. It's when the truth comes out that the trouble begins.

FAY. Martin, you're surely above satire at such a time.

GLOADE. You're always right, Fay. But the thing is Mr. Forshay and Miss Tippet belong to each other, and the only way to bring about the match is by force.

FORSHAY. I don't like to be rough with the poor little angel. (*He goes to the door*) Mayn't I try persuasion?

GLOADE. Try anything. But I advise an axe.

(FORSHAY *goes to the door and talks through it in low pleading tones.*)

FAY. (*Leading* GLOADE *down* R.) Martin, do you think you are right?

GLOADE. Divinely.

BREARLEY. How modest!

GLOADE. She loves him; he loves her. They both told me so.

FAY. But is Tom an ideal husband?

GLOADE. Oh, my Lord, Fay, you're not going to look for an ideal husband for that very real woman?

FAY. But he's poor and excitable.

GLOADE. He has a great mind. His mental processes are simply superb.

BREARLEY. Be serious!

GLOADE. I've offered him a job in my work. That's how serious I am. He won't take it, of course, but he'll be rich and powerful and he and Coralie will bully each other blissfully to a ripe old age and many quarrelsome healthy grandchildren.

BREARLEY. But you don't intend to surrender that exquisite girl to that—that—why where I came from they lynch men for——

GLOADE. So you said. You'd better go back to where you came from.

BREARLEY. I don't intend to aid in such a wrong.

GLOADE. You'll always aid the wrong—you'll always be comfortably wrong with the great majority.

FORSHAY. (*Turning from the door*) She won't consent to marry me, and she puts it all on the ground of her love for me.

GLOADE. Well, then, for the love of—Coralie, go get her.

FORSHAY. I can't break the door down.

GLOADE. You can't!

FORSHAY. Of course I can, but it's your door.

GLOADE. I contribute it as my wedding-present—one mahogany door.

FORSHAY. Much obliged.

GLOADE. You know the minister across the way? He's a nice fellow, though he abhors me. Wait a moment. Poor old Parker is likely to misunderstand—and resist. (*Calls off* R.) Parker, Parker!

PARKER. Yes, sir.

GLOADE. You run over to Mr. Blenkenshaw's.

PARKER. The minister's? He'll be in bed, sir.

GLOADE. Get him out. Tell him that Mr. Forshay is coming over to marry Miss Tippet right away.

PARKER. For heaven's sake!

GLOADE. I hope so. Tell him they've got to catch a train and he's got to marry them. And, Parker, you stay as witness. Pay the fees and everything. (*Gives him money*)

PARKER. Yes, sir.

FORSHAY. Much obliged. (*Calling through*

the door) Stand back, Coralie, for I'm coming for you.

GLOADE. One moment! I may have a key, after all. (*Looks over bunch of keys*) Yes, here it is. (*Hands him the bunch with a Yale key uppermost but takes it from him again*)

No, she'd like it ever so much better if you went through the door. A cave-man with a latch-key lacks that certain something. You'll have use enough for the latch-key after you're married. I never liked that door anyway. (*He motions* FORSHAY *to go ahead*) (*He leads the others down* R.) Now, Fay whatever you do, don't interfere.

Now, Fay whatever you do, don't interfere.

FAY. That awful word!

GLOADE. No matter what Coralie says or does, ignore her. She'll fight like the devil, but she's on the road to heaven.

BREARLEY. I'll not stay to witness this.

GLOADE. I wish you wouldn't.

BREARLEY. I'll do all I can to prevent it.

GLOADE. Don't get in the way of the bridegroom. You know him.

FORSHAY. Here goes.

(*Dashes against the door, bounds back goes through it with a crash. There are sounds of protest, struggle, faint cries for help.*)

BREARLEY. This is awful.

FAY. Oh, I can't stand it.

GLOADE. You told me yourself that if I'd carried you off I could have had you.

FAY. I never did!

GLOADE. You implied as much. Now, see nothing, hear nothing except what I say.

(*He talks against time and tempest during the ensuing passage of* CORALIE *across the stage.* CORALIE *struggling against* TOM, *thrusting her hands out to* FAY, *to* GLOADE, *to* BREARLEY.)

CORALIE. Let me go! I will not marry him! You beast! I'll scratch your eyes out! You hurt me! I'm not worthy of you! Oh, Aunt Fay, won't you help me. Professor Gloade, save me. Mr. Brearley, oh, will no-one save me? Oh, dear, oh dear, Tom, you're so strong. I'll go quietly if you'll quit dragging me. I can't be married if you don't let me walk.

FORSHAY. (*At the same time*) You're coming with me, if I have to drag you. You're coming to the minister. I love you, you little beast. The minister is waiting. We've just time to catch the train. Your Aunt will send the baggage. I adore you, damn you! You can't escape.

GLOADE. (*Talking all the while and standing down* R. *between* FAY *and* BREARLEY *holding them each by an arm as they struggle*) It seems to be one of Nature's strongest wishes that the female shall select the male most congenial to her by studying all of those to whom she is congenial. What looks like flirtation is only the instinctive wisdom of youth. It is dangerous and many tragedies result, especially when the laws of Nature encounter the laws of Man and the various tabus and conventions that savages and so-called civilized communities set up. We must distinguish between what is really moral and what is only custom. The most vicious customs become religions when they are long enough established. Furthermore, you can never tell, when you see

an apparently weak woman being apparently overpowered by an apparently strong man, which one of the two is really the victor—usually both are victorious, and then also Nature is.

(*By this time, the couple have fought their way out* R. 1. E. FAY *is exhausted.* BREARLEY *in a towering rage.*)

FAY. This is frightful.

BREARLEY. Monstrous! You have compelled me—me! to connive at an abduction.

GLOADE. An abduction, yes! But who abducted whom? I maintain that Coralie has carried off Tom as much as Tom Coralie.

FAY. Oh, I hope they'll be happy. Did you see how splendidly Tom played his part. I didn't know he was so good an actor.

GLOADE. I thought Coralie acted her part pretty well, too.

BREARLEY. Acted! You mean she wasn't sincere?

GLOADE. Of course she was sincere. She wanted Tom and now she's got him.

BREARLEY. Well, now that you've got your dastardly experiment under way, perhaps Mrs. Crosby will let me escort her to her lonely hotel.

GLOADE. Certainly.

FAY. Well, good night, Martin. I'm sure I'm ever so much obliged for what you've done for Coralie.

GLOADE. If you want my help on a similar occasion——

FAY. Oh, me; I'm not the Coralie kind. I'm tamed—utterly. I'm sorry I was so cross with you. I don't wonder you don't like me, but I do like you.

GLOADE. Who said I didn't like you?

FAY. Why, you called me a—a catbird.

GLOADE. Who told you so?

FAY. Well, I don't like to say.

BREARLEY. If you must know, I did. I couldn't bear to see you so polite to her face and so contemptuous behind her back.

GLOADE. Who said I was contemptuous?

FAY. Well, you must admit, Martin, that catbird isn't the most complimentary term in the world.

GLOADE. How do you know it isn't? What do you know about catbirds?

FAY. Not much, but——

GLOADE. (*Excitedly, looking over the cases among the few books*) Do you know why I happened to call you that name?

FAY. My catty ways suggested it, I suppose.

GLOADE. Your cat-birdy ways. Well, I was reading what Chapman said this evening while I was putting on these—aromatic evening clothes and I always read when I dress and I had the "Birds of North America" on my table and I came across this quotation from Olive Thorne Miller (*Finding page*) and it fitted you so perfectly that—Read it!—(*Offers her the book.*)

FAY. (*Shyly*) The type is so fine and—I have to wear glasses now when I read.

GLOADE. Fine! So do I. You might have liked it better if I had called you a *Domatella carolinensis.*

FAY. What's that?

GLOADE. That's slang for catbird. Well, here's what the hand book says about you. (*Reads*) "The Cat-bird is one of the most intelligent birds of North America"——

FAY. Martin!

GLOADE. Be silent and attend: (*Reads*)

"She is inclined to be very friendly. In the garden she is as useful as she is enchanting. Her value in preserving our fruits can hardly be overestimated."

FAY. I do like to put up preserves.

GLOADE. Hush, woman! (*Reads*) "The catbird mother is one of the most anxious and devoted. If her nest is discovered, she exhibits so much distress that one sympathetic to bird griefs has no heart to pursue investigation. The catbird is generous and helpful to others of her kind in trouble of any sort, feeding and caring for deserted or orphaned young ones of any species, and always ready to aid distracted parents in the defense of their homes and little ones. The catbird is of a lively and restless temperament, very playful—full of droll pranks and quaint performances. I know of no bird better worth cherishing and cultivating than the catbird."

FAY. (*Weeping*) Oh, Martin, Martin, and you called me a catbird.

GLOADE. Thank heaven, you can cry. You've suffered so much today without tears I was despairing of you.

FAY. I can stand sorrow, but I can't endure joy.

GLOADE. Well, I'll promise you plenty of sorrow if you'll make your nest with me.

BREARLEY. Well, I—I'll say good night.

FAY. Thank you so much.

BREARLEY. For what?

GLOADE. For saying good night. It's the pattest thing you ever said.

FAY. Don't you mind him.

BREARLEY. Don't you.

GLOADE. She won't.

FAY. Why, Martin, I expect to obey you in everything.

BREARLEY. Good night.

GLOADE. You can't go and leave us two children unchaperoned.

BREARLEY. All right, I'll stay and look the other way.

GLOADE. Brearley, we're friends again. Now, Fay, you may embrace your future fate.

FAY. Have you still got that awful beetle in your pocket?

GLOADE. I believe I have. I forgot all about it. (*He takes the envelope from his pocket*) It is empty. He got away.

FAY. Thank heaven!

GLOADE. I hope he has found the mate he was looking for—as I have. And the same good luck to all the lonely lovers in this beautiful world.

(*They embrace*)

CURTAIN

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